# THE DEAD WAKE

## HORROR COLLECTION VOL 1

ELLIE DOUGLAS

# The Dead Wake
# Anthology
# Ellie Douglas

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**Disclaimer.**

All of the stories within this anthology are to entertain you, some will be filled with sexual material that may offend, others may be filled with language that may offend. The individual stories are set in different locations. While some are written with a location of America others are with the location of my own country, New Zealand. So the spelling variation will be very different. I use a combination of British English and American English based on the particular story's location.

Some of the stories are meant to be funny while others are meant to be serious.

Also some of the following stories will become full novels. Email me author1ellie@gmail.com with the one you'd like to see as a full novel and the one that has the most votes will become my next book for you to enjoy. Make sure to visit my website www.authorellie.com and join my subscribers list so you can be informed of new releases.

As an added bonus for you. If you'd like to see your name featured as a character in an up and coming novel then let me know and consider it done. :)

Enjoy the short stories.

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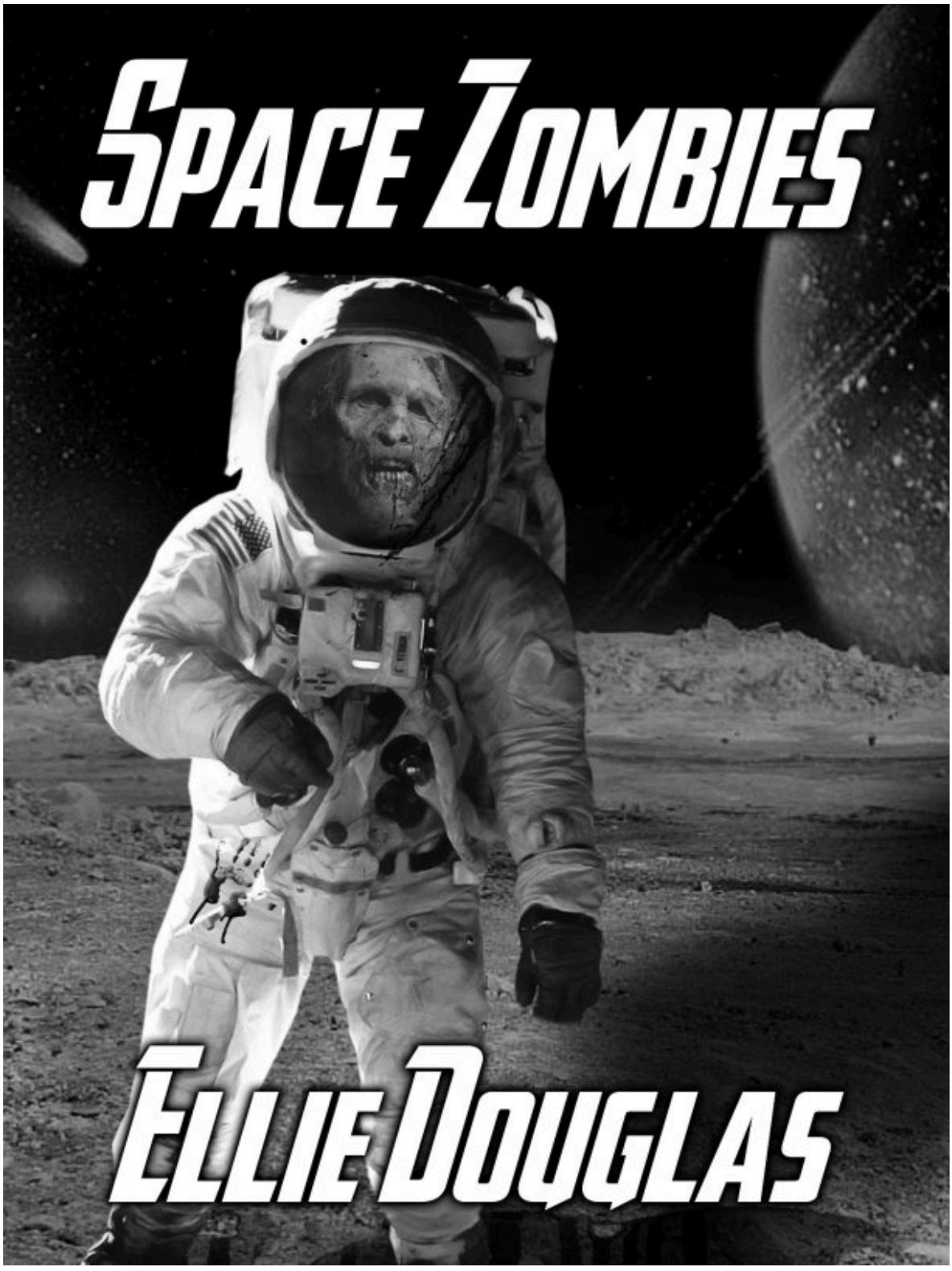
SPACE ZOMBIES
ELLIE DOUGLAS

# SPACE ZOMBIES

# NASA - September 3010 Trip To Mars

“John, what is that rock you keep playing with?” Nico asked while trying to take it from him.

Moving stealthily out of Nico’s way, John Lancaster looked as if he had stepped out of a myth from long ago. He was like a towering bronze statue that breathed life, walked, talked, and made commands. At six feet six inches, he toyed with Nico, maneuvering the rock from one large palm to the other without dropping it. His facial features didn’t change. He glared at Nico in a playful yet authoritative manner. He carried himself like the captain he was.

“Shit man, I just want to look at it.” Nico insisted as he reached for the rock as it gently passed between John’s hands. No matter how close he thought he was, he still missed by several inches. Second-in-Command Nico Farone stood five feet eleven inches tall. He was still wearing his NASA overalls; they were bright white with blue stitching down the sides and a blue logo on the chest with his name and rank. He gave up trying to get a look at the rock John carried, and started off.

“You give up too soon,” chuffed John.

“Well, I wouldn’t say give up. It was more like I was letting you to win,” Nico retorted with a quiet laugh.

“Whatever helps you sleep at night. You keep telling yourself that.” John tossed the rock at Nico as he walked away, accidentally hitting him in the head.

“What the hell?” Nico rubbed at the back of his head. He looked down at the polished wooden floors of the bunker they were in and found the rock. Bending over, he picked it up. It had snapped in half and was spilling some kind of black goo all over his hands.

“You didn’t have to throw it at my head. And look. You broke it.”

“Gee, your head must be made of steel. By the way, would you believe I was aiming for your ass?”

“What is so special about this damn rock?” Nico asked while staring at it. He handed it back to John, and wiped his hands on his overalls. It looked like any other black bit of rock. It felt the same in weight to any other rock, and had no distinct markings. Except it seemed to be bleeding, like gummy sap from a tree.

“I picked it up from Mars for Lucy. She begged me to bring something back from outer space. I guess now she will get two halves.” John looked up and around the room and saw that Pete was about to leave. “Pete, come here.”

“Yes, Captain?” Pete asked as he crossed the room to John’s side. John took out a plain wooden box and put the two halves of rock inside.

“See to it that Lucy receives this once we are in orbit.” John handed Pete the box and a sealed letter he had written earlier addressed to his wife Alice.”

“You got it, Sir.” Pete left the room and entered his own quarters on the barracks, tucked the sealed letter and box inside a knapsack, and stored it at the end of his bed. It would be his first delivery in the morning.

John casually stripped off his NASA overalls and jumped onto the top bunk. He sat on the edge of the bunk in his boxers. Hanging around John’s neck was a thick silver locket. He opened it up and on one side was a picture of his wife, Alice, and the other side his seven-year old daughter Lucy. He gave each of them a kiss and said goodnight. John lay down heavily and closed his eyes. Eventually, he found sleep.

Nico didn’t feel tired. Instead he had his own ritual; one that would see him leave the barracks on a mission to eat as much real food as he could before a flight into space.  Nico hated the mashed, pureed food that they had to consume for far too many months. So his own personal mission on earth was to stuff his face. Given the hour, he only had a few options. The closest was McDonalds. Nico knew that eating heavy meals like that could make him sick on the flight, but he always pushed reason aside to feed his gut.

The next morning the crew set out on route to Mars.

# Onboard the USS Spartacus

“Why the fuck didn’t you stop eating shit before the flight?” Pilot First-in-Command Roger King asked as he moved away from Nico. Suddenly a blaring alarm boomed around the control room.

“Proximity alert?” John’s tense voice came from behind Roger as he braced himself against his captain’s chair before sitting down and buckling himself in.

First Mate Stiner was already yelling orders back to the ship’s computer, Athena.

“Source?”

“A massive asteroid storm.” Athena’s voice was calm and serenely artificial. It echoed through the control room.

First Mate Bridgette Stiner punched in a series of commands on the panel in front of her. She took a quick glance through the large window and could see a rock the size of a house headed straight for them. After a pregnant pause, Bridgette’s wide-eyed gaze broke from the window and she yelled, “Hang on to something!”

Roger was madly busying himself with a series of buttons and yelling commands to Athena. The ship suddenly dipped and tilted sideways, just barely scraping out the way of the rock hurtling toward them. The force of the rocks hitting the ship sent everything that wasn’t strapped down into a turbulent spin before dropping heavily to the floor in the artificial gravity. The powerful force hurtled Nico against the bridge’s bay door. The impact stole his breath away. He managed to right himself, only to bend over and paint the floor in more vomit.

Bridgette and Roger righted the ship, and Athena was giving another readout.

“D-deck has a breach and there is a fire in the engine room.” Her voice vanished just as quickly as it had appeared.

“I’m on it, Captain,” Bridgette called out. She opened the hatch and disappeared into the engine room.

“I got D-deck. I’ll pick Lucas up on the way,” John yelled as he left the bridge.

Roger turned sharply at the sound of thick liquid hitting the ship’s floor. His eyes rolled backwards and he grimaced, then quickly turned back to

face the window overlooking the galaxy. Nico couldn't stop vomiting as he held tightly to his stomach with one hand while his other braced his wavering, unbalanced body on the bridge's wall. His forehead glistened with a sheen of sweat, and his otherwise tanned skin was turning ghostly white.

"Someone get him to the med bay," Roger ordered.

Sam, one of the ship's communications systems technicians, escorted Nico to the med bay. Once there, Doc Liam Hodges gave Nico a look over.

"So Doc, what the hell is wrong with me?" asked Nico through bouts of nausea.

"With your symptoms, I'd say you have gallstones."

"And? How do I fix that?"

"Well, stop eating fatty food and you'll be right as rain. This will pass in a few hours. Just rest here for the time being," Liam said. He dipped his hand into his white coat pocket, pulled out his bright orange harmonica, and started playing 'Home on the Range.'

"Doc?"

Liam turned his hazel eyes at Nico and kept blowing a tune on his harmonica.

"Listen to me. It don't feel like gallstones, man. This feels different. Even my fucking ears are on fire. Everything feels hot."

The doc walked to a set of stainless steel drawers and opened one. He pulled out a thermometer, and continued playing 'Home on the Range' while he took Nico's temperature. He stopped playing suddenly and his eyes grew wider. Liam reset the thermometer and took Nico's temperature again. He got the same result. 107.9 Fahrenheit.

"Seems you are running a fever," the doc said while putting his harmonica back into his pocket. He walked to the same bench, but this time opened a glass cabinet above it and took out some pills. He grabbed a water bladder from the small glass fridge and gave them both to Nico.

"Just rest. I'll come back and check on you in an hour." The doctor put the rest of the pills away and left the sickbay.

Nico nodded his head. Even that was unbearable. His mind felt like a prison. His vision blurred as the pain intensified throughout his body. The pills did little to help.

The storm had fully passed and Roger relaxed and waited for Athena to report in with any further damages.

“System’s check. Everything is good. The fire is out, and John and Lucas are soldering a panel on D-deck, Sir. No damage to report,” Athena chimed in and was gone just as quickly.

Roger leaned back in his seat and looked out the window. Despite the violent storm that had just passed, the galaxy looked beautiful once again, like a bag of diamonds tossed onto black velvet. Everything glistened with brilliant, various colored sparkles. His thoughts were interrupted when Lucas’ voice hissed over the radio.

“All clear here. We’re coming up.”

Roger looked at the mic. He didn’t feel the need to answer Lucas, so he just left it. Instead, he unbuckled his belt and stepped out of his chair. Bridgette returned, soot covered and smiling.

“What are you smiling about?”

“We’re alive. That always makes me smile.”

First Mate Bridgette walked to her seat and instead of sitting she flicked a few switches putting Athena on auto piolet freeing Roger from piloting the ship.

“I need a coffee. Maybe some food too, depends on what Paul is cooking. Roger, are you coming?”

“Yeah, sure,” Roger answered. Sam and Second Communications Systems Technician Travis stayed behind.

Bridgette stretched her long legs and followed Roger out. They headed for the breakroom. In the breakroom Paul was busying himself in the kitchen area.

“What’s on the menu, Paul?” Bridgette asked.

“Well, you have a choice. Pureed beef strips with carrots and peas, or pureed pork and rice.” Paul winked at Bridgette before removing his chef’s hat, revealing oily, thinning dark-blonde hair. Bridgette watched in disgust as Paul ran his hand through it before putting his chef’s hat back on.

“Wink at me again and I’ll remove your eye with my toothbrush,” Bridgette grumped and snatched a tray of food and coffee from Paul. She then walked backwards toward a chair so that Paul was still in her sights. She slowly unwound her middle finger and flipped him off before turning and taking her seat.

“I love it when you speak dirty to me,” Paul said while rubbing his dirty hands across his apron then handing Roger a tray of food. Roger looked

down at the meal and instantly lost his appetite. All he could visualize was Nico's puke.

"Paul, there is a pile of sloppy regurgitated shit on the floor of my control room. You know the drill," Roger said after taking a seat beside Bridgette.

"Sure, great, get the cook to clean up vomit. I might just scoop some of it up and serve y'all later," Paul retorted with a laugh. He grabbed a mop and bucket and exited the kitchen.

"God, he's such a dick."

"Oh, you love it. He wants you. And I do mean all of *you*." Roger looked Bridgette up and down with an evil sneer that spread across his face. His eyes landed on her crotch before finding her face and breaking into a laugh.

"Yeah, well he's been trying on every damn flight. He won't be getting into my pants. He just isn't my type."

"*Really* Bridgette? And what is your type, then?"

"Stop it, Roger. This kind of teasing I'd expect from a kid."

"Gee, you aren't normally this sensitive. That time of the month again, huh?"

Bridgette shot out of her seat faster than Roger could blink. He flinched when he saw her fisted hand rise up, but it didn't save him from her punishment.

"Well now, I have to say you hit more like a man," Roger said, snickering while he nursed the back of his head. Bridgette growled at him like an angry dog, picked up her tray of food, and stormed out of the room. She knocked elbows with Paul as he was returning to collect his cloth and disinfectant spray.

"What's ya hurry, hot stuff?" Paul asked as he narrowed his beady eyes toward her breasts.

Bridgette stopped abruptly, swiveled on her heels, and faced Paul. He rested the bucket on the floor and leaned the mop against the wall closest. Paul made a funny face, and that was enough to rile Bridgette. She hurled her tray of food right at him. He ducked out of the way and the tray bounced off the wall and onto the bucket before crashing by his feet. The remaining food went flying in all directions.

"You should see your face," Roger said as he walked by, carefully stepping over the spilled food. Paul could hear him laughing even after he'd

left the breakroom.

"That little bitch. She could have taken my fucking eye out," Paul said aloud to himself while he cleaned up the mess. He grumbled and moaned about it. "She must really love me," he said, and then he laughed until tears rolled from his eyes. "Yep, she really loves me."

# Nico

Nico stumbled off the cot and headed straight for the bathroom with severe stomach cramps. They erupted like a volcano with potent flatulence followed by a bout of diarrhea and more vomiting. Afterwards, Nico picked himself up as best he could, but his body stayed bent forward with the pain. He was left to do a standing crab crawl. He slowly made his way out of the bathroom and back to the cot. His body ached everywhere. His restlessness turned into a series of convulsions in response to the pain that seemed to attack his joints, heart, brain, and muscles. Every single inch of him screamed in agony. He felt as though his insides were disintegrating. His eyes frantically searched the open space of the med bay for the doctor.

Until now, Nico had never noticed the ship's engine noise, or the ventilation system, or any of the noises that surrounded him. Now they alarmed him as they appeared amplified within his ears. He was irritable, scared, and confused. He grew paranoid and started to hallucinate. First he saw his younger self at school in the principal's office, having been caught smoking on the school grounds for the third time. This time he was suspended. He remembered flipping off the principal and storming past his tearful mother while kicking up stones in the school carpark.

Then his memory took him even further back, to when his parents argued nonstop in front of him. He felt he was to blame when his parents divorced, so he had begun to rebel by smoking weed and staying out all night long. He stole money from his mother and got a serpent tattoo across his back and a snake on his right forearm.

His next thought he didn't recall ever happening. It was new, scary, and unreal. He saw himself free falling from a high cliff, when a powerful jerk pulled him back. He felt the chute behind him. He landed in unknown territory right into the open fire of unknown aliens. They were using peculiar guns unlike anything he'd ever seen before. He could hear the shouting and feel the fire of those powerful weapons. Suddenly he looked down and saw a hole in his chest the size of a bowling ball. He didn't feel any pain. There was no blood, no organs; nothing but an empty hole. He shook and fell off the cot onto the cold steel floor.

His eyes betrayed him as he opened them to see a tall figure looming over him. He blinked, and the thing was gone. He opened his mouth to

scream, but a dark thick substance spewed out of his mouth and dropped to the floor, slithering away. He no longer knew what was real and what was nightmare. Nico rubbed his eyes and grabbed at his head. His brain felt as though it was being dipped into a fat fryer. When he lowered his hands he freaked. He saw that both his palms were covered in handfuls of his hair, which tangled between his fingers. Nico took a few steps toward the silver counter and looked down to see his reflection and screamed bloody murder. The skin on his face had peeled backwards like a banana, exposing the first layer of skin underneath. Ruptured, split-open sores the size of golf balls had erupted all over his entire body, and more of his skin had peeled away like some kind of pod.

His eyes had changed color, from blue to almost red, and his once full head of auburn hair had almost vanished, leaving a few wisps of hair dangling from his aching scalp. His eyes blinked in rapid succession and he looked harder at his new image, studying himself with uncertainty and shock. Then his eyes travelled back to the bed, and there he saw his hair plastered all over the pillow.

Nico let out another scream, this time long, loud, and inhuman. Doctor Liam rushed in and almost tripped on his own feet when he saw Nico. He rushed back out, locking Nico in the room. Nico charged at the doors and slammed a bloody hand to the glass. His eyes met Doctor Liam's, who watched from the safety of the door between them. Liam was momentarily stunned and blankly stared at Nico. He noted the sores, the skin eruptions, the discoloring of his entire body, and the loss of hair and blood.

"What the fuck man? Let me out!" Nico didn't even recognize his new voice. It sounded like he was talking through some kind of voice changer. Ignoring it, he continued to pound on the door and yell at the doctor to let him out.

"You might be contagious. I need my suit. I'll be right back." Liam sounded an alarm and waited further along the wide corridor out of sight from Nico. He dipped his hand into his white coat, pulled out his harmonica, and started playing *Church of the Poison Mind* by Culture Club. He sat against the wall crossed his feet at the ankles and, waiting anxiously. He wasn't sure what was happening, but he knew he didn't want any part of it.

Nico didn't believe him, not when he saw the hazmat suits hanging on the hooks in the far corner of the room. He grew angrier and threw his

hands to his aching head before falling to his knees screaming in pain. As if it accompanied the pain in his head, his skin everywhere started to rupture into holes the size of matchboxes. Nico looked down at his arms, legs, and his stomach, and watched in horror as thick, sharp black stumps began growing out of those holes. He rubbed his fingers over one and sliced the tips deeply.

Nico was highly confused. He was scared and in shock. He felt every one of those black things push their way out of his body, leaving behind a slimy substance. He watched as each of those black things seemed to come to life, just like the thing that slithered out of his mouth. They moved fast and with purpose, scurrying up walls and vanishing into the vents. Nico had no idea what they were, or how they moved with no visible feet or eyes.

Suddenly, his body convulsed in tremendous pain and jolted violently as though he was being cattle prodded. He screamed out in horrific pain and could barely sustain a single breath. He felt as if he was dying. Nico's eyes began to shut and he took one last breath. He keeled over forcefully, face planting on the cold steel floor. Blood pooled under his lifeless body.

Doctor Liam stared in disbelief, his harmonica held limply in his hand while his mouth gaped wide in trauma at the sight of Nico. He hadn't seen the creatures, but he did see Nico's body had erupted into a patchwork of bloody holes. A few seconds had passed, and John was now standing beside the Doctor. The alarm was shut down.

"What the fuck happened? Doc! Damn it, Liam, are you fucking home?"

"Yes. Sorry. I. I. I don't have any fucking answers for you, man. I've never seen this shit before."

"Well, get in there and figure it out."

"I can't; he might be contagious!"

"You need to figure out what happened, doc. Find out if he is contagious or not. For the sake of this crew it is your fucking job to find out. If he's not infected by something foreign then we can take him home and give him a proper burial, until then we treat this as a contagion, it is protocol—you should know this."

"I do! That is why I ran out of the room when I first entered. Because of fucking protocol and I had to leave him to die like that, that's on me for the rest of my fucking life."

“Doc, you couldn’t have known he was gonna die, so stop the guilt trip and focus.”

“And if he’s not clear?” Liam said shifting his thoughts fast, not wanting to feel guilty.

“Then we bag him and float him.”

“I need my suit first.”

“And?”

“It is in the room.” Liam pointed to the suits on the hanger.

“Aren’t there any other suits you can use?”

“No!”

“Don’t yell at me, Liam.”

“Sorry. I’m just really shocked to see this shit, ya know?”

“Look, go get one of the spacesuits. That should work for now. Find out why he fucking died. I’ll inform the crew that Nico has died, but we are not going to say from what, not yet. This is your job. Find out if we are all in danger.”

Liam went to the loading docks and took one of the spacesuits. He suited up and made his way back to the med bay. At the med bay door he looked through the glass for a while, observing Nico. Then he put the helmet on and unlocked the door. Nervously, he entered. Liam headed straight for the hazmat suits. With the thick gloves on, it was hard for him to unhook a suit from the hanger. He was tempted to take the gloves off, but thought better of it.

After a few more tries he managed to get the suit off the hanger. Liam rushed back out of the room. Once outside, he stripped off the spacesuit and put on the hazmat suit. He could walk better in it, and with the gloves being of a lighter material, he felt better equipped to examine Nico.

Liam unlocked the med bay doors again and entered. He headed for the long, stainless steel bench, pulled open a drawer, and took out six vials and a syringe. He went over to Nico and bent down to inspect him. Liam had to hold back the vomit that was fast rising. He swallowed hard and blinked several times.

He sat down next to Nico’s body. He picked up Nico’s arm and pushed in the syringe. As he was drawing blood he couldn’t help but notice the fact that it was discolored. Instead of it being red, it seemed almost black. It was also thicker and slower to draw out. Once he’d finished collecting the

samples, he stored them inside his chest pocket and made his way to the door.

Once outside he tore off the helmet and breathed in the fresh air. Liam felt the cooler air and immediately felt more relaxed. He'd never been claustrophobic in the suits before and assumed his panicked state had more to do with Nico's corpse than his own demons. He unzipped his hazmat suit, peeled himself out of the arms, and tied the sleeves around his waist. He realized he had forgotten his samples and quickly untied them, pulled the left side up slightly, and retrieved the syringe and vials. Then he retied the sleeves around his waist.

He stood facing the med bay, staring at Nico's body. He couldn't understand what had happened. What were those eruptions that had split Nico's skin into sections as though he was being readied for the butchers? He noted the slimy black goo surrounding the holes all over Nico. There was much more to this than a simple illness; he'd have to go back in for more samples. He untied the sleeves, pushed his arms through, zipped it back up, and put on the helmet. When that was secured, he unlocked the door and went back in.

Liam put the collected blood into the fridge and started collecting the other samples. He worked fast and hard; he didn't want to be in there longer than he had to be. Once he was done, he grabbed a sterile body bag and put Nico's body into it. He hoisted him up onto a gurney. Then he fumigated the lab with a special vent that poured a sterilizing vapor into the room. When it was all completed, he felt safe enough to remove the suit. With sweaty hands he removed the helmet and unzipped the suit, pulling it off his arms and tying the sleeves around his torso. He wasted no time in his investigation, and was so deep in analysis that he didn't hear John entering.

"Doc, what'd you find out? Is he contagious or not?"

"John, it will take another couple of hours before I find out. What I have discovered is odd, because I have no idea how Nico would have come into contact with it."

"With what?"

"Years ago there was a report of an alien substance found in rock formations on a planet called Tridentol. The stuff reported is similar to that which I've found on Nico's body. None of it makes sense."

"OK. What does this stuff do, then?"

“It acts as a living parasite within a host. Once it has drained the host of its nutrients, it abandons the host in search of another. It effectively kills everything it bonds with.”

John’s mind thought back to the rock that he had shown Nico earlier; the very one that had broken when it hit Nico’s head.

“Doc, would the rock infect everyone it came into contact with, or can some be immune somehow to it?”

“Theoretically, yes. I’d have to go back and read the reports to make sure. Why?”

“So it can infect one person but not another. Is that what you’re saying?”

“Again, John, yes, I guess that is possible but I need to do more research.”

“Do that research fast. I need to know. I think I know where Nico made contact with this Tridentol. Here, do a test on me first. Make sure I’m uninfected.” John rolled up his sleeve and extended his arm to the confused doctor.

“If you were infected, John, you’d show symptoms and clearly you aren’t. What is this all about?

John told him about the rock he’d found, of how it broke and bled, and how he had sent it to his daughter. Liam could see the panic spreading across John’s face.

“Get Nico’s body into the infirmary. I’ll be here a while. I want to put your mind at ease and do this research.”

John couldn’t stop thinking about his family.  He took the gurney roughly and wheeled it into the infirmary, leaving it in the middle of the room. John’s need to reach his family was becoming urgent. He raced to his quarters and used the softphone, a communications device that managed the long distance calls from space to Earth via computer. Before calling his wife Alice, he sent off an urgent email to the CDC and the medical team at NASA informing them of the possible threat.

He then dialed in his home number and waited for Alice to answer. When she didn’t pick up, he irrationally thought the medical team had already been to his house to collect his wife, his child, and the rock. Rationally, he realized it was impossible, so he tried again. By his calculations it was only 4 p.m. back on Earth. He wondered where she could be. He tried again, and she finally picked up.

“Babe, what took you so long? Is everything all right?”

“Yes, honey, everything’s fine. I was just getting back out of the car. I was going to take Lucy to ballet, but Lucy started to complain that her tummy hurt.”

“Oh, is she OK?”

“She is. I think she just didn’t want to do ballet today. Is everything OK with you, John? You look stressed.”

“It is all good, sweetie. Did you receive the package I sent?”

“Yes, we got it. I gave it to Lucy, why? John, tell me what is wrong.”

“I don’t want to alarm you but there maybe something wrong with the rock. I need you to box it back up. Can you do that for me? I’ve already sent an email to the medical staff at NASA, and the infectious disease people at CDC have also been notified. They will be sending someone out to get you both.” John felt sick, and was unable to hide the worry from Alice.

“What the hell, John? You’re really scaring me now. Do I need to wear gloves? Are we infected with something? You’ve got to be more specific, otherwise I’m going to be worried sick. Should I be worried?

“Alice, darling, I wish I had the answers for you. But I don’t. Yes, it might be a good idea to put gloves on before touching the rock again. I am working on a theory and I pray to God that I’m wrong. But for precautionary measures, I need to know that you and Lucy are safe.” John could hear Lucy in the background demanding to talk to him, but he couldn’t see her on the monitor.

There was a slight pause before signals were caught up with each other. When they had, Lucy was sitting on Alice’s knee waving hello. John looked her over and a sense of sadness rushed at him. He didn’t want Lucy or Alice to see, so he diverted the pains into a fun joke.

“Hello precious. I have a joke for you. What do elves learn in school?”

“I dunno daddy, what?”

“The elf-abet.”

John watched his little girl’s face beam into a beautiful smile and giggle. John relished in her giggling and locked the memory in his heart.

There was another long pause before the monitor caught up with the signals. John put his index finger to the screen and held it there. Lucy copied him, playing a game of trace the finger around the screen.

“I have to go now. Be a good girl for mommy.”

“I will daddy.” Lucy blew John a kiss and then got down off Alice’s lap and rushed off to play.

“John, I’m scared.”

“I know babe, but don’t worry. The medics will make sure that you and Lucy are fine.” John wanted to believe that more than anything.

“I love you, John,” Alice said with a tear streaming down her cheek. John felt sick and hated the situation, but he had to remain strong. He couldn’t let Alice know how deeply concerned he really was. He blew Alice a lingering kiss and said his goodbyes.

John shut his laptop down with a heavy sigh and retreated to the control room.

# Deadlock

Roger glanced at Sam, noting his thick arms that bulged from beneath his overalls. He was an ugly man with a crooked nose. The story went that he'd had it busted so many times during high school that it became unrepairable. Sam stood at five feet eleven inches, and had the body of a weightlifter: thick like an old transport ship.

"Roger, why not let Athena take over and come play poker with me and Lucas?" Sam asked as he made his way to the door.

"Sure. Give me a minute, I want to call home first."

Roger pushed a series of buttons and left Athena in charge of the ship. He walked to his quarters and threw his hat on the bed before picking up his laptop. He returned to the edge of his bed and waited for his wife, Phoebe, to answer. No one did. He put the laptop on the floor and lay down, unintentionally falling asleep. An hour later he woke to something crawling across his chest. He jumped off his bed, swiping at his chest. His eyes caught a glimpse of something black as it scurried under his bed. He got on his knees and looked under the bed, but couldn't see where it went. Suddenly something bit his ankle. When he turned around to see what it was, his head hit a leg of the bed. He groaned in pain and lowered his body to slide out enough to turn around.

Now facing the right way, he could see the blood from his ankle wound pooling under his leg. The pain was intense. He looked around for the culprit, but couldn't see anything. It concerned him that something foreign, and apparently hostile, was on board the ship. His mind panicked and thoughts of what it could be infiltrated him like a speeding bullet. "Aliens," he murmured. Then, out of nowhere, the black thing he had seen earlier scampered across his right leg and bit straight into his thigh just above the knee. It moved at lightning speed, biting down hard enough to open a hole into Rogers's body. He watched in terror as it burrowed in. His skin morphed as the thing slithered around under his skin. It went deeper and deeper, causing excruciating pain. Roger squirmed and yelled out in horrific pain until he passed out. He woke up an hour later to a pounding on his door. Roger tried to call out, but his throat felt raw.

"Co... Com... Come in."

“Can’t, it’s locked. Are you OK?” John’s voice echoed through the locked door.

“No... get the... Doctor.”

“On it,” John said with urgency.

Several minutes later John returned with the doctor and Sam. They all wore hazmat suits as a precautionary measure, since they did not know what was wrong with Roger. John didn’t want to take any chances. Sam punched in an override code which unlocked Roger’s door. The three men were shocked when the door swung open. They saw Roger lying in a pool of blood, and parts of his skin were blistered to the size of large ping pong balls. *Just like Nico’s*, thought John. Liam and John got Roger up and helped him to the med bay.

“What the hell did this, Doctor?” Sam questioned anxiously. John was pretty sure what, but he didn’t want to cause alarm until the doctor confirmed everything. Neither John nor Liam answered Sam. Sam formed his own conclusions and his mind conjured up every scenario known to mankind.

“Come on, Captain, I have a right to know. What is going on?”

“Yes, Sam, you do. Very well. It appears we might have a contagion of sorts, but we do not know what. Something is clearly infecting people on board. What that something is, well, we are still waiting on the doctor to figure that out.”

“So are we in danger?”

“Stick to protocols and you’ll live. Go back to the control room and inform the others.” John ordered. Sam did as he was commanded. His worry burdened him and his thoughts on his family dug deeply in his mind. Before heading to the control room he made a detour to his own room and phoned home. Afterwards he hastened to the control room. He hadn’t been in there long when he was called back to Roger’s room.

Back in the med bay Liam gave Roger a sedative, which instantly put him into a deep sleep. Once he was asleep, Liam went to work. He had not been working long when Bridgette appeared at the door offering assistance.

“You can’t help unless you put the hazmat suit on. I still don’t know if this is contagious.” Liam opened the door and handed her a suit.

“Is it the same thing that happened to Nico?”

“How do you know about that?”

“John told us that Nico had died, but not how. So I’m asking you, Doc, is it this?” Bridgette pointed to Roger as she pulled the hazmat suit on. She entered the room and locked the door behind her.

“I haven’t had time to finalize my tests. At a glance it looks contained, whatever *it* is, but I don’t know, Bridgette. ”

“Well, something has breached the ship, and we need to contain it,” Bridgette suggested while stitching up parts of Roger’s left leg.

Liam nodded in agreement. “The only thing we know for sure is that something bit Roger by the looks of these wounds. That means we have something running loose on the damn ship, and it needs to be found. But tell me, Bridgette, how the hell do we find something when we have no idea what it is? We don’t even know where it came from.”

“John is getting Sam and Paul to do a sweep of Rogers’s room. From there, they will find it. Whatever it is, they will find it,” Bridgette insisted.

“I hope you are right,” Liam said while stitching up Roger’s right arm.

# The Dead Rise

“We have turned this room upside down three times, John. There is nothing in here,” Sam said. He was exasperated and slumped up against the doorway. The hazmat suit was making him feel overheated.

“Then it must have gone out the fucking door or through the vents. Tell me, Sam, where do those vents lead?”

“Everywhere. They go fucking everywhere. They cover the entire ship.” Sam chided, making further steps to exit Roger’s room.

“Exactly! I’m going to see how Roger is. You two make yourselves useful and find this thing,” John said authoritatively.

“Can we take the damn hazmat’s off yet?”

“Outside of Roger’s room you can.” Was all John offered as he headed back to the med lab. First he wanted to check his email, so detoured to his quarters. He turned on his laptop and eagerly waited for it to load. He checked his emails, but there had been no news from home. He figured no news was good news and put his laptop away, and then made his way to the med lab. His thoughts assaulted him and he couldn’t stop fretting about his wife and daughter.

Sam peeled off the hazmat suit and took in a few deep breaths. Paul removed the helmet and put it on the floor just outside Roger’s door. He unzipped his suit but left it on. Sam headed down to the lower level of the ship while Paul took the level they were currently on.

In his search, Sam walked past the infirmary and out of the corner of his eye caught movement inside the small room. He stopped and looked through the large glass window. His mouth hung slack. He quickly swiped his hand over the mechanism and the doors spread open. He entered, rushing towards the stainless steel table and quickly unzipping the black body bag.

“Jesus fucking amen, you are alive. We were all told you’d died,” Sam said excitedly. He unzipped the bag to Nico’s waist. He froze when he saw Nico’s damaged body. Sam stumbled backwards and tried to flee the room, but a decomposed arm snatched at his shoulder and pulled him backwards hard. Nico sunk his teeth into Sam’s shoulder and took a large bite. Sam’s flesh tore upwards like a tender roast pig being carved. Nico’s teeth effortlessly ripped away at Sam’s muscles and tendons. Blood splashed about wildly.

Sam screamed out in pain and tried to push Nico’s face away, but he had no room to extend his arms with his back pressed against the stainless steel table. He was wedged between the table and Nico’s mouth. All Sam’s attempts to save himself proved futile. His arms dropped to his side limply and twitched

sporadically when Nico's razor sharp teeth tore into the base of his skull, killing him instantly.

Sam's dead weight forced his body to slip downwards, inadvertently helping Nico off the table and out of the black body bag. Nico continued to feast on Sam's dead body. Vital fluid and bone flung into the air like a geyser and sprayed the sparse white walls with a coating of red. Nico ripped open Sam's guts and pulled out every organ, feasted on them like Thanksgiving turkey. He pulled, ripped, and stripped until nothing was left but an enormous hole.

Nico growled and hissed, spitting gristle and bone to the floor in a wild frenzy as he consumed parts of Sam's body. He left his brain intact. Nico buried his head inside the split-open chest and pulled out parts of Sam's heart. Suddenly, Nico's head twitched upwards when he heard a noise and part of Sam's heart fell out of his mouth. Nico quickly got to his feet and made his way through the open doors. His strange eyes were fleeting and flickering from side to side like lights going on and off. Lucas was coming down the corridor.

"Holy fucking hell. You are alive. What the fuck happened to you?" Lucas asked as he rushed toward Nico, wanting to help him. He had gotten to within one foot of him when Nico reached up and grabbed at him. "It'll be all right, mate. Let me help you," Lucas insisted as he pushed Nico's arms back down.

Nico didn't stop moving, making it harder for Lucas to get a secure hold on him. Nico was wriggling violently and he was slippery with Sam's blood. Suddenly Nico bent forward into what Lucas thought was an indication of near collapse. Lucas leaned forward to assist Nico better and his cheek was bitten right off. It tore away like paper sliced by a guillotine.

Nico wasted no time and continued to furiously bite Lucas. Lucas fought back, kicking Nico in the legs which freed him. He started to rush off, holding onto to an apron of skin which flapped loosely from his torn up cheek. Lucas felt dizzy and his vision became blurred with spilled blood. He crashed into a wall as he tried to escape. Getting up, he tried to remember which way he had been running, and continued on his path. He thought he was heading toward the main galley; instead he was heading back in the direction of the infirmary. He smeared blood along the floor as it splattered profusely from his face. Suddenly he was knocked off his feet. He found himself on the floor, kicking at Nico and screaming like a dying wolf.

"Get off! Get the fuck off me, man!"

Lucas's voice was stifled quickly when Nico leaned down and tore his lips right off. Nico spat several teeth out and they shot to the floor like miniature cannon balls. Nico went back for more while Lucas kicked underneath and tried to get away. Nico overpowered him and buried his head over Lucas's face,

ripping his nose off sharply and viciously. Lucas's body jolted savagely and aggressively as he shoved, pushed and kicked to get Nico off of him.

Lucas lost the strength to fight back. Shock was taking over and he screamed without lips which gave no shape to his sounds. They just produced garbled noise. He continued to scream until his throat filled with blood. No one heard him. No one came to help. He laid there saturated in his own blood, and helplessly watched as Nico ate him alive. He watched right up until Nico pulled his eyes from their sockets. When Lucas could no longer see or handle the pain, he slipped into unconsciousness, only to die moments later when Nico ripped into his skull like he was tearing up confetti. Nico's mouth filled with Lucas's scalp, hair, and bone, which hung from his decaying lips. Again, his feeding was stopped when he heard another noise. He stood fast and rushed toward the commotion.

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Back inside the infirmary, Sam's arms and legs twitched as life reanimated his body. He stood up, shakily at first, and looked around the room. Now his abilities were heightened. He sensed things with more clarity than he ever had when he was a human. With a gaping hole in the middle of his stomach and another ascending into his chest cavity, he shot out of the room at an alarming rate. He was ravenous.

He sniffed out Lucas's corpse, but he wanted live blood and a beating heart. Sam stood still and listened. When he heard the voices from another level above, he used his unearthly long strides and raced straight to the noise. He found his way into the control room. Without hesitation he rushed up to Travis, the Second Communications Technician, and bit down on the side of his neck. A large chunk of flesh separated and hung loosely from a strand of muscle as gore spurted in time with his dying pulse. Travis could barely let out a scream. It sounded muffled and he gurgled when blood filled his open mouth.

Sam bit down again and again in such a frenzy that Travis felt his body collapsing from the struggle and lack of air. The stench of Sam penetrated into the back of Travis's throat, and he did everything he could to stop himself from hurling. Sam didn't stop, he bit and ripped into his flesh like a hippopotamus on a crocodile. Travis could hear his skin being torn away as Sam gormandized a trail down his bloody form. He watched as his flesh was ripped upwards and swallowed in wads by Sam.

Travis passed out when Sam gnawed his left arm off. Blood shot out and splattered the control panel and spewed across the steel floor. Sam jolted his head toward the door when he heard footsteps and sensed fresh blood. Dropping

Travis' arm from his mouth, he ran to the doorway before Bridgette had a chance to fully enter.

The door was her only saving grace. It acted as a barrier and allowed her to react and run out of the control room screaming. Along the way she hit the alarm from a side panel on the wall. She used her hand and swiped the doors open to the rec room, and then did the same on the inside, locking herself into the room. Sam was two steps behind her. He slammed into the closed doors and pounded his bloody hands against the glass. John was in a deep discussion with the doctor when Bridgette had rushed in like a bull. They both looked up, startled.

"What the hell is going on?" John asked. He stood up and walked toward Bridgette. Liam stood looking at Sam through the glass window. Sam was watching them, his eyes going from one to the other with a hungry 'I'm going to eat you all' look spreading across his face. His hand slapped at the glass and Liam jumped backwards with fright.

"He fucking ate Travis," Bridgette said while she caught her breath. She was bent over with her hands on her hips, as she sucked in air fast.

"Ate him?" Liam questioned, stunned at what Bridgette had claimed.

"Yes. Read my fucking lips. *Ate him*," Bridgette said slowly before regaining her strength and righting her body. She moved over to a glass cabinet and punched in a code. The doors unlocked. She opened them and pulled out a stainless steel box, took a key that she wore around her neck, and unlocked it. Inside were two pistols. She handed one to John.

"Let's do this," she said while unlocking the safety on her gun and aiming it at the door.

"On my count," John said. He'd been quiet up till now, observing Sam through the glass. His mind bushwhacked him with thoughts of his daughter turning into the same thing as Sam and he shivered vigorously out of his thoughts and back into the present.

John stood by the door's locking panel with his right hand raised, ready to unlock it. He cast a quick glance at Bridgette, who nodded she was ready. With that he swiped his palm over the panel and the doors hissed opened. Sam wasted no time and rushed in. He charged at Liam. Both Bridgette and John shot at him, yet he didn't go down. They kept shooting at him. Sam had reached Liam and savagely tore a clod of flesh from his arm.

"What the fuck man? Shoot him!" Liam screamed while trying to back away. It was a futile attempt. Sam was faster and stronger, and immediately overpowered Liam, tossing him to the ground and ripping into his body like he was stripping wallpaper. Parts of Liam's skin flapped and swayed loosely before they were fully torn off and eaten. Dark liquid sprayed around like a broken

sprinkler. Liam's screams echoed around the room and over the sound of the blaring alarm.

John had grabbed Bridgette and yanked her forcefully out of the room. He quickly locked Sam in. Sam turned his head momentarily away from Liam's dying body and looked right at John. His empty eye sockets bored holes right through John, which caused him to startle backwards and collide with Bridgette.

"Why didn't the bullets take that cock sucker out?" John snapped as he dragged Bridgette away from the area and headed for the escape pods.

"Where are we going?" Bridgette yelled as she tried to remove her hand from John's grasp.

"Getting the fuck off this ship."

"What about the others?"

"Jesus. OK. Come with me." John let go of her hand and they rushed to the control room. Travis's body was twitching and they thought he somehow managed to survive the attack. Until they got closer. Travis sprung to his feet with an unholy speed and reached for John. John moved quickly enough to stop Travis from grabbing him. He swung around and grabbed Bridgette's arm. They rushed out of the control room, closing the door behind and locking Travis inside.

"You satisfied? Now let's go!" John commanded.

"The others, John. What if they are OK? Please, we must find them." Bridgette pleaded.

"Fucking hell woman! You can see, right? We have to get out or we will end up just like them."

"John, please. We've been with these people for the past eight years. We can't just leave without knowing if they are dead or alive."

"All-fucking-right!"

After a search on that level, they went to the level below and soon discovered the bloody corridor that led to the infirmary. Bridgette's heart raced and her head throbbed. John had picked up two more guns on the way down, but Bridgette knew they were of no use. Suddenly out of nowhere, Nico charged at them. Bridgette managed to get her weapon out before John, and she fired non-stop. The bullets didn't even slow him down. Nico charged at them at full speed. His skin was saturated in blood, which made him look twice as scary.

"Bridgette run!" John screamed at her before he was bowled over forcefully. When he hit the ground his head cracked on the steel floor. Bridgette screamed and tried to get Nico off of him, but it was impossible. Bridgette shot Nico in one last ditch effort, but the bullet went through his cheek and out the other side. It took his ear off, but it did not stop him. She watched helplessly as Nico bit

into John's throat, ripping it from him like tearing off a waxing strip. It was fast, messy, and sickening.

The noise Bridgette heard would reverberate in her ears for the rest of her life. She bolted, ran as fast as her legs would go, and got to the escape pods. She climbed into one and set the coordinates for Earth. While the pod started up she effortlessly put on her space suit from years of practice. She did not see the black thing as it slithered into the pod. It snaked its way under the pilot's seat and predatorily waited for Bridgette. With a tear stained face she punched in a series of keystrokes on the small keypad. The pod churned and fired up. Suddenly the hangar doors opened wide and she was shot into space. She was heading home to Earth.

The End

FLESH EATERS
ELLIE DOUGLAS

# FLESH EATERS

# Passing Through

Darren was all alone in the fifth car. He'd moved from the sixth when a couple of teenagers had got on at the Cambridge stop. The two young boys filled the car with enough loud music and colorful verbal language that Darren decided to get up and take stock of the next car. To his surprise it was empty.

Darren sat in the middle row and propped his legs onto the seat in front and pulled out his book. He'd only turned the page of *Blood Brothers* by Larry Grey when the lights went out. Then they came back for a minute before going out again throwing the car into complete darkness. He left the book face down on the empty seat next to him and slid across the seats until he was facing the window.

Darren pressed his face against the cool glass to look outside the window only to realize it was a sea of darkness void of any discernable landmarks. He assumed it was a city-wide outage and he figured he'd find out more once they arrived at Bramble, the next station. He tried phoning his wife, but he wasn't getting any bars on his phone so he gave up and put it back into his pocket. He sat there, with his face still pressed against the glass, wondering when the power would come back on.

Darren was startled out of his thoughts when he heard the doors opening from car four. He tried to see who it was that was entering, but in the inky darkness he could only see a faint dark figure moving against the lighter wall. It appeared to be the slender, tall frame of a woman. Darren kept watching, hoping for the lights to turn on so he could catch a glimpse. Then he remembered his cell phone. He dug into his pocket and pulled out his phone. He turned the flashlight on and lit up a narrow part of the aisle. The figure was indeed a woman, and dressed in a sharp business suit.

"Thanks for the light. I nearly wet myself when it went dark. I don't understand the power outage, do you?" Melissa sat next to Darren and stared at him as if she was studying a fancy restaurant menu.

"No idea. I think the entire city is out though. Well, at least from the looks of it from here. What made you come up in here in the dark?"

"I came from the fourth car. There wasn't anyone left in there. I didn't want to be alone. I hope you don't mind."

“No, of course I don’t mind. Where are you heading?” Darren changed the subject, noting how nervous the woman seemed.

“Home,” Melissa said. Her words came out in gapped breaths.

“Where is home?” Darren encouraged her to continue talking.

“Phoenix Station,” she practically whispered.

“I see. You have seven more stops to go.”

“How on earth do you know that?”

“Look above the seat near the exit door on the right. Do you see the map? That’s how.”

“Oh!” Melissa said, then added, “but it’s dark. How can you read that from here?”

“Oh no! It’s dark? Really? Why didn’t anyone tell me?” Darren tried to get a giggle from her, but she was far too nervous and scared.

“Please. Tell me how you did that. I’m not in the mood for jokes. *Please*.”

“I have been traveling this train for the last five years. I have memorized every stop. You shouldn’t worry so much. It’s just a power outage; it will be back on soon. My name is Darren Cunningham, what is yours?”

“Melissa and, and, um, I have my reasons for being scared in the dark. Just please don’t leave me, OK?”

Darren found it so odd that a grown woman would be this terrified in the dark, and presumed she’d had something horrific happen to her. He did his best to keep her calm while his mind flicked to his wife. He grew anxious knowing how jealous his wife became. If she knew he was even talking to another woman his head would be on the chopping block. Darren looked at his cell phone. He still had no bars.

They both jolted at the sound of the doors opening from carriage six. Darren watched as two lights darted in every direction, as if a Parkinson patient was handling a torch. He swallowed hard and hoped it wasn’t the two wayward teenagers. His hopes were squashed flat when the two fully entered into the car and headed right for them.

Darren felt Melissa move a little closer toward him, and he could feel the tenseness in her. He could almost feel the tingles across her arms as the two rowdy boys got closer. Darren leaned over to Melissa and whispered, “It’ll be OK. They’re just a couple of drunk kids.”

“Either of you got any smokes?” The lankier of the two asked.

“I don’t smoke,” Darren answered.

“How about you, hot stuff?” the taller boy asked while shining his cell phone torch in her face.

“I don’t smoke either,” Melissa said while she scooted even closer to Darren. Darren’s thoughts drifted to his wife. If she saw him now she’d conclude her own scenario and presume Darren was cheating on her. He instinctively pulled back a little.

Jeff, the taller of the two, loomed over the seat and hovered before opening his mouth to speak. His breath reeked of alcohol. Suddenly the dark train pitched forward, racing toward Bramble Station without slowing down. Darren seemed to be the only one that noticed.

Jeff turned awkwardly to face his buddy Tom. “Let’s go into the other carriages, there’s bound to be someone that smokes.” Tom didn’t reply, and Darren could only assume that Tom had nodded in the dark. It was hard to see anything, even with the cell phone torches.

The lights came flickering on and Melissa nearly jumped right into Darren’s lap. Darren moved back more, but soon found himself against a partition. Melissa eyeballed the two drunken teens and watched them walk themselves unsteadily toward the doors to enter back the way they had come, into car six. Then she cast her eyes toward Darren and noticed his two-tone hair coloring of dark blonde with blonde highlights.

Darren was staring back at Melissa and he noticed her dark eyes. He found himself agreeing with his inner voice that she was a pretty woman, one that would earn him a knock on the head if his wife, Suzy, caught him looking. He diverted his eyes toward the outside. Looking through the window was pointless now that the train lights were back on. All he could see was himself. Through the reflection he could see Melissa studying him, which made him very uncomfortable. She looked at him with her cold fearful eyes like she was going to attack him. He turned sharply and spoke a little too loudly, “They are gone now.”

Before Melissa could answer Darren the train’s lights went out again and her ears picked up a scream, followed by another that was much closer and much louder. She tried to pinpoint the direction of the scream and immediately her mind went to the drunken louts.

“Do you think they just attacked someone?” Melissa moved closer to Darren again. When she spoke her voice sounded frightened. Darren shone the torch toward her face and he could see in the glow that she was on the

verge of tears. He would never understand women. He didn't feel like there was anything to be crying over.

"I think those two drunks would be incapable of attacking anyone." Darren said trying to reassure her.

"Well what was the screaming for then?" Melissa was squeezing herself closer to Darren as she spoke, and he wasn't enjoying it. All he could visualize was his wife scorning him.

"I dunno. I guess I'll go find out," Darren offered as a means to get away from the crazy woman.

"NO!" Melissa howled, and Darren could feel her body trembling. He instantly felt guilty for wanting to bolt away from her. At the same time he did feel a sense of urgency to find out what the screaming was about.

"No? But don't you want to know?" Darren quizzed her as gently as he could.

"Well, yes of course. But I don't want to be alone in the dark and I don't want to go with you because someone in that next carriage could be waiting with a knife and kill us."

Darren ensured the light was now facing away from his face and then he rolled his eyes. He wondered what this woman had ever endured in her life to be so terrified. He was pretty sure she would be scared of her own shadow. It made him laugh to himself as he remembered the scene from *Lost in Space* when Dr. Zachary Smith thought he saw a monster and screamed, only to realize it was his shadow.

Darren wanted to burst out laughing; he felt powerless with guilt over wanting to help. He knew then and there that it was his wife sitting on his shoulder, like the stern uptight angel of his conscience watching over him. Watching over his every move. His every thought. He felt frustrated. Then, out of nowhere a loud male voice shrieked from car six. The lights had flicked on for a few seconds, before once more flicking off and throwing them back into complete darkness.

"What was that?" Melissa asked while grabbing a fistful of Darren's white shirt.

"Without going to see I won't be able to tell you, so I have to go have a look. You'll be fine right here. Do you have a cell phone?"

"Yes, but the battery died before I even got on the damn train. Please don't leave me." Darren felt Melissa's grip tighten on his shirt.

“Look, I need to make sure no one’s seriously hurt. How about you lock yourself into the bathroom?”

“Yes. Sure, that is a good idea.”

“Melissa, you’ll have to let go of my arm and let me out.”

“Sorry,” Melissa cooed with an embarrassed tone to her voice.

Darren stood up and took the lead. He shone his cell phone out front and took Melissa’s eager hand. Her hand was sweaty and hot and Darren felt very uncomfortable holding hands with another lady. He quickly made his way to the bathroom, pulled open the door, and gently pushed Melissa inside. “Lock the door and I’ll come back for you soon.” Darren went to walk away when Melissa grabbed his arm roughly and pulled him back.

“Don’t be long I really hate the dark.” Darren pulled himself free and turned to face her.

When he did, the lights flashed on again and he was able to see Melissa. She had the door almost fully closed and only her head was poking out. “I promise you I will be back as soon as I can.” Darren watched her close the door and heard her lock it. Then he made his way to the doors leading into carriage six.

He opened them and peered into blackness, trying to adjust his eyes to the stygian cauldron of car number six.

# The Driver

Myer McKenzie was out of his engineer's seat with his bloody face pressed up against the window of the door leading into the first car. With no one at the controls, the train was barreling ahead with no one to stop it. The only working lights on the train were the instruments and the glow of the train's headlight. The lights were casting bright yellows and reds on the silver buttons of Myer's jacket.

The door to the engineer's booth was locked from the inside, and Myer was the only one who could open it. He hit the door with an open palm and squished his face occasionally against the round glass window. Myer would stop and turn and slap the control panel with an open palm, then circle around and hit the window again. He had no idea how to open the door. Not anymore. Not since he was taken over by the virus.

Myer smelled fresh blood six cars away and couldn't get out of the booth to satiate his hunger. He grew angrier, speeding up his circular pacing and hitting the controls.

This time he kept hitting the controls which turned the lights on and off. He stayed that way for a long while.

# Mommy, Monsters Are Real...

Someone was rattling at the door of car eight. It wasn't just the train's movement; something was trying to get through the door to feast on the living that sat terrified in their seats. No one knew what was going on except for one little five-year-old boy. He had seen the start, had tried to tell his mother about the monsters outside, but she wouldn't listen.

Now, two hours after he'd first seen the monsters attacking people on the platform of Temple Station, he sat on his mother's lap clutching to her for dear life. It wasn't until the lights went on and off that his mother started to listen. She was questioning him over and over when all hell broke loose.

There were nine passengers spread out in different seats in that car. One old man grew tired of the rattling door. He got up and opened it, and seven undead stampeded through the door. The old man was knocked to the ground and trampled on by four of the monsters while two stayed behind and tore him apart like a school of piranhas. They degloved his entire body in less than one minute.

The little boy, Jake, with help from his petrified mother, managed to crawl up into the luggage compartment. He stayed there as quiet as a mouse, crying for his now dead mother. But it didn't matter how quiet Jake was. The things worked on scent alone. They could smell his metallic blood and homed in on him quickly, although they could not get the luggage compartment to open up. Several of them hit it repeatedly. Each time they did little Jake screamed for help.

Light flooded the train, illuminating gore, guts, bits of body and organs that had splattered in all directions. The chairs were soaked with body matter, and the walls bathed bright crimson. The floor was slick, like olive oil, with body fluid, bile, and partially digested gunk. Jake could be heard screaming from as far back as carriage four. It drove the things mad. They pounded on the luggage compartment and growled loudly like a pack of hyenas.

Jake stopped screaming when the things stopped pounding on the compartment. He waited a few more minutes before opening the hatch. Slowly and carefully, he began to push open the compartment lid. When there was enough room he peered over the edge and his eyes grew wide in fright and his mouth opened into a series of howls. Multiple arms reached

up for him, clawing and grabbing for his flesh. Jake could hear them as they hissed and growled like rabid animals. He leaned forward by accident and was grabbed roughly. He could feel their nails digging into his skin and ripping his flesh clean off as they pulled him out of the compartment. He felt numb and he went limp. His body didn't even hit the ground; the monsters tugged and ripped him apart on his way down. In a matter of seconds he had been torn apart as if Freddie Kruger had carved him up himself. Bits of his body flung into the air and some of it stuck to the ceiling before falling with a gloopy sound as it hit the wet floor.

With no more live bodies remaining in that train car, the monsters circled back and forth in a wild frenzy like a group of drugged-up pigs rooting around for truffles. They would walk toward the car doors and slam into them with their bloodied bodies. They would then rush forward to the center and circle around each other before heading back to the doors. The fresh smell of blood had them feverishly sniffing around, eager and desperate to get into the other cars. If they continued smashing into the doors, they would eventually break them open. The monsters had lost all brain function and were acting purely on primal instinct, something pre-dating man himself.

# Reality Bites

The lights flashed on, startling Darren. He hadn't expected the sudden brightness and it caused him to blink rapidly. His heart fluttered faster than he'd ever felt before. It wasn't from the unexpectedness of the light blinking on; it was what the lights showed him. The entire car was covered with carnage that Darren could only assume was shot from a cannon filled with body confetti. He blinked long and hard. He didn't want to see, yet seemed compelled to look. Darren's eyes took in images he knew he'd never erase. Bits of body matted with hair, teeth, intestines, arms, legs, pinkish liver remains, brain matter, fecal and other liquid all splattered about as if a lunatic painter had a massive tantrum and turned over all his paints.

Darren almost slipped on the sanguine fluid as he took a step inward. Without warning, the lights went out again and he found himself having a panic attack fighting for air. His hands reached to his throat and he gripped tightly to his collar while trying to get air into his lungs. He panted futilely and heaved for air. His eyes bugged outward and a blood vessel burst, causing a spider-like pattern to spread across the whites of his eye. Darren stumbled backwards when he heard something slithering around at the far end of the car. As he moved backwards his arms reached for the door behind him. His feet slipped out from under him and he fell.

He could feel the sticky substance beneath him saturating his suit. He gripped onto a chair and pulled himself up. The sound grew closer and Darren panicked more.

"Get the fuck away from me!"

The lights flooded the car again just as he grabbed the door handle. He pulled the door open and caught a glimpse of the thing charging at him. His heart pounded in his chest as he leapt through the door to escape the monstrosity. He caught his arm on the frame, scratching it deeply. He yelped in pain, but managed to slam the door and then quickly turned to face the window. Darren braced himself against the door when the thing charged at it. The door rattled fiercely and Darren worried for a moment that it would break through. When it didn't and the lights flicked off again, all fell silent. The only noise Darren could hear was his own labored breathing. He leaned against the door for what seemed like an hour. It had

only been ten minutes. He took out his cell phone and tried his wife again. Still no bars. He used the cell phone's torch and made his way to the bathroom. He frightened Melissa who screamed when she heard him approach. Darren waited for her to unlock the door and come out. When she did he accidentally shone his cell phone torch into her face. He noticed the smudges and streaks of mascara.

"Well, what'd you find out?" Melissa asked while she held tightly to his shoulder.

"Nothing. I didn't find out a damn thing. There's nothing but empty seats on the other side of those doors."

"Do you think it was just those drunken teenagers then?"

"I would say so. Come on, let's go sit. I need to get off my feet. The train is jerking around a little too much. It's making me feel a little dizzy."

Darren took Melissa's hand and again felt the dampness from her excessive sweating. He led her to the first row of seats and sat her down, and then he flopped into the empty chair next to her. His heart was still pounding and he felt dizzy, though it wasn't from the train's movements. Darren shone the torch toward the window and still saw nothing but his own reflection. He quickly shone the torch toward the ground.

"What do you do, Melissa?" Darren was fishing for a distraction. He didn't want to think about what was on the other side of the car or what was now tattooed into his memory forever. He just wanted to catch his breath and make it off the train alive. He thought about ways to do that while he chatted with Melissa.

"I'm a telecommunications operator for an insurance company. What about you, Darren?"

Darren looked at his stained suit and wondered if she'd noticed. His eyes betrayed him as his cell phone light travelled the stains along the tops of his thighs to the bottom of his legs. When he realized what he was doing he shone the torch away and prayed the lights didn't come back on. Explaining the amount of blood on him wouldn't be an easy task.

"I am a branch manager for City Bank. Nothing fantastic, but it pays the bills."

"What does your wife do?" Melissa asked so casually he thought for a moment that she was the one now distracting him.

"She's a high school teacher. Are you married?"

“Me married? That’s a joke right? I’m only twenty-four. I don’t plan to get married for a while. Besides, you’d need a really stable partner for such a long commitment, and right now I’m...”

The lights unexpectedly came back on. Darren immediately tried to hide his clothing but it was of no use. Melissa’s reaction showed she’d seen. She was out of her chair and moving backwards, bumping into multiple chairs while more tears streamed down her face.

“Melissa, I can explain...”

“No! You lied to me. I know that what I heard meant something. Damn you. Why did you lie?”

“I just didn’t want you to panic like you are now. The thing responsible for what happened in that car is still in that car. I’ve never seen anything like it before in my entire life. It was grotesque. If monsters are real, then that thing is a monster. Honestly, I don’t know what the fuck it was.”

“Whoa, what? What did it look like and what did it do? Your damn suit. Jesus, your suit. It’s washed with blood. Oh my God, Darren, what happened back there?” Melissa’s eyes stared at the car door and she moved a little toward it before changing her mind and taking a step back. Darren grabbed her shoulder and put her back into a seat. He shushed her to be quiet. He was worried that that thing would smash through the door and eat them alive.

“Imagine a fetus. Then imagine it as a fully grown adult man. Now picture that with a bunch of torn skin and as gray and white as an elderly person’s hair. Something that has teeth the size of a bear’s, and nine inch long talons. Then you will have pictured what I saw. It was fast and strong, too. But it seems to be brainless. It can’t open the door. Not yet at least.”

“What do you mean not yet?”

“Well, I dunno really. I mean, what if learns how to somehow?”

“So, how are we going to get out of here?”

“We have to wait for the train to stop at a station.”

“This entire thing is so screwed up. I feel like we are in a nightmare.”

“Come on, Melissa, sit back down. You need to calm down and be quiet.”

“NO!”

“Melissa?”

“I want to go home *now!”*

Darren's brain felt on fire. His throat was as dry as the Sahara Desert, and he stunk. He couldn't believe the rotten smelling stench that was drifting to his nostrils. He wrinkled up his face and thought deeply about what to do. Then he realized there was the other car. He stood fast and rushed over to car door, and peered through the circular window.

"Wait, Darren. Where are you going?"

Darren mutely held up his hand. Melissa bit her tongue to keep from talking. She was shaking like a leaf caught in an autumn breeze. She moved toward Darren until she was pressed up against his back. Darren's eyes grew wide and he felt uncomfortable with her body against his. If his wife caught him like this she'd cut off his dick. He inched to the left a little, and she followed like an unwanted shadow. He gave up and continued to look through the circular window. He couldn't see any movement. It didn't seem like anyone was in there. It was the car that Melissa had arrived from, so he felt reasonably certain that those things weren't in there. The lights went out again and he felt Melissa grip him tighter than a vice. She pressed her face against his back and squealed as she held on for dear life.

"Fuck's sake, Melissa, what the hell happened to you?" Darren asked as he moved away from the window and toward the middle of the car. It was like walking with a sack of potatoes attached to his ankles. The dead weight of her frightened body acted like an anchor.

"I was *raped,"* she said. She was pressed up hard against his suit jacket and he didn't hear her. Darren stopped, pulled out his cell phone, and lit the aisle up and wormed his way away from Melissa and she rebounded twice before she finally allowed enough space between them.

"I didn't hear what you said. Why are you so afraid of the dark?"

"I was raped in the dark," she sobbed. She became hysterical when a loud pounding on car door six came out of nowhere. She jumped so high that she almost touched the low hanging ceiling of the carriage. Darren took her into his arms even as his mind protested doing so. Flashes of his wife came at him like a speeding bullet and he had to push the images down. If Melissa lost it completely they would surely die. He had to keep her quiet, even if it meant embracing her in what could only be described as some feng shui kind of sexual entanglement. She was pressed so hard against Darren that there was no room left for an ant to crawl through.

"What are we going to do?"

"We're gonna get out of here."

“How?” sobbed Melissa, whose face turned sour at the taste of salty tears mixed with the stuff from Darren’s jacket.

“Lets start by getting you calm. Then we can walk through the cars, OK?”

“Then what? I mean, that won’t help us off the train.”

“Well, we are closer to the engineer’s room, so we can go straight there and make him stop the damn train.”

Melissa snorted up excessive mucus and nodded her head mutely. Darren waited for her to compose herself before leading her to the door. Together they hovered at the door, waiting in the dark.

“What we are waiting for?” Melissa shakenly questioned.

“I want the lights on first,” Darren said quickly.

Melissa didn’t reply. Instead she looked into the darkness of the car window and waited with Darren for the lights to come back on.

# Death... Blow By Blow

Further back on the train, in car twenty-six, seven people sat in the dark wondering why the lights were out. Some had heard distant screams, but none had gone to investigate until one bored twenty-something-year-old decided he needed to stretch his legs in the adjoining car. The lights came on and caught his bright, pink-tipped, bleached hair. It was long and spikey at the top, almost like a Mohawk only flat. He wore tattered black clothes and a huge safety pin swung from his waist clipped to his holey shirt.

He pulled open the door and moved forward but he didn't get far. He was struck backwards. When he fell his legs caught in the doorway, effectively keeping it open. Looming over his fallen body was a disgusting figure that crouched on top of the punk. His screams were quickly silenced as the thing tore into his body. It happened so quickly that the onlookers could barely respond. It was like watching a time lapse movie, where something dissolved into nothing in the blink of an eye. A middle aged woman was the first to respond, jumping up and rushing to the car door leading into car twenty-five. She didn't get very far, for that car was filled with ten of those things. As soon as she had the door open they were on her like buzzards on a snake.

With both car doors wide open, the room was overtaken in seconds. Suddenly, a thing lunged at Carl, one of the men in the car, grabbing his ankle and dragging him into the middle of the aisle. A younger lady who went by the name of Lena tried to yank the thing from him. The fight only intensified the attack. He pounded on the mutated nose of the thing, pulverizing it into a mushy rhubarb crumble. Lena kicked at it, but a hand grabbed at her shoulders, pulling her down fast. Before she could fend off what it was, two of those things were on her and biting everywhere.

Her flesh was ripped upwards, being torn from her like stringy melted cheese from a pizza. Blood spouted upwards and sideways, covering the back of the seats, the walls, and the floor. Her mouth was ripped from ear to ear. Another thing was grabbing at her nose. Her nose resisted a little at first, but the thing was strong and had it off her in seconds. It ravenously brought the bloody nub to its greedy mouth.

Her face was now unrecognizable. With decaying fingers they were poking right into her eye sockets, digging their fingers in and pulling them

out loaded with bits of Lena, then bringing them directly to their bloodied mouths. They bit and shredded every bit of tissue, vein, and bone. Lena looked as though someone had poured gallons of red paint over her. Completely drenched in her own claret, she twisted, kicked, and violently convulsed as she died. But then something odd took place. Her body convulsed again, thrashed about the floor like a fish out of water, and then went still. Suddenly, she stood up, fully awake and searching for living blood.

Carl could only gasp as he watched the things devour her like lions on a zebra. Their frenzied feasting would be one of the last thoughts he had, as he watched them flay her skin into strips. He watched as they chomped and sucked at the remains of Lena before her corpse miraculously reanimated. This was no miracle, however. They all turned their attention to him, and he could no longer watch as his own flesh was being cleaved from him.

His body felt as though it was being forced into an excavator mulcher. He yowled out with each bit of flesh that was wrenched from him. A massive six foot five thing opened its jaws engulfing the top part of Carl's head inside its mouth. He felt like his head had just entered that of a shark as its teeth gnashed his cheeks, ears, scalp, and neck. The bites came down fast and hard. Along with the violent shaking, he could feel things snapping, cracking and splintering. One second he could see, the next he was in complete darkness, covered in gore, slime, and the worst stink he'd ever smelled in his life.

The thing swung around, avoiding the other hungry mouths that wanted Carl for themselves. This one had him and he wasn't going to be sharing. He dragged him along the middle of the car and headed through the opposite doors with his body dragging behind like a busted mannequin. He could feel the pressure on his neck building and that feeling of it beginning to tear away. The thing kept pulling, twisting, and biting with powerful jerking movements that tore at his cervical spine. Carl helplessly heard his bones snapping. The sound of breaking bones would be the last thing he heard as the thing tore his head off.

The thing held his head in its mouth as if it was showing off some prized hog. Then the monster dropped his head and as he moved away it snagged in the thing's footing and was dragged along the ground, looking like a boney lizard's tail as the savage made its way up the next aisle. Carl's

spine made a distinct *rat-a-tat* sound before it shattered into multiple pieces. The other things rushed for the remains of it like gulls on a fish.

The other mutants in the room were going berserk. Arms were being gnawed off, splattering fluid of all colors around the car like a burst pipeline. It had only been five minutes and that room and its passengers were completely eviscerated. What didn't get decapitated had reanimated, joining the rest on the hunt for live bodies to gorge upon. In cars twenty-four and twenty-five the things were making enough noise to cause someone in the adjoining cars to open the doors to investigate. It was all the opportunity they needed.

# Home Run

It felt like hours since the lights had been on. Darren could feel the vibrations from Melissa's nervous twitching. "Soon," he whispered. In truth he hoped it was soon. Another ten minutes passed and the lights came back on. Darren pulled the door open. "Wait here," he demanded as he stepped into the car and looked around. He stood close to the door and purposefully made some noise by clicking the back of his cell phone on the railing of the closest chair. When nothing showed up he opened the door and pulled Melissa in.

Together they carefully walked down the middle toward the next door. Melissa couldn't help but notice the speed of the train, and the hoarse Clickety-clack underneath her felt like roaring thunder matching that of her fast beating heart. Darren held onto the handle while his eyes searched wildly for what could be in the next car. He still couldn't see anything. "Stay here," he muttered. He opened the door and closed it swiftly behind him. His heart throbbed and he felt like he was being hit in the chest with a baseball bat. Sweat was dripping down his temples and plastering his shirt to his back. He swiped at his forehead with the back of his arm and looked around the room. This one was empty and had no signs of blood in it at all. He didn't know if that scared him more or less. He made some noise, just to be certain. When nothing came at him he opened the door and pulled Melissa in.

The lights went out and Melissa pounced on him almost knocking him over. Darren wanted to push her off of him, but he knew that she'd only clamber back onto him. He took a deep breath and motioned forward. Darren had reached the middle of the room and stopped abruptly, causing Melissa to collide with him and freak out.

"Why'd you stop?" Her voice sounded muffled, and Darren realized it was because she was speaking into his back again.

"Move back some. I can't hear you."

Melissa stepped back an inch, but held on to Darren's jacket with a forceful grip. "I asked why you stopped?" He didn't answer for a few moments, which only intensified her panic. "Darren?"

"Please be quiet, Melissa, I hear something."

Darren listened for more sounds. When none came he caught his breath. He waited for his heartbeat to return to normal before he carried on, silently praying for the lights to come back on. He had tried calculating the time between lights on and off, but they did so far too erratically. There was no

discernible pattern, which only frustrated him. He continued toward the door. When he reached it he pressed his face against the window and looked into the blackness. He took a step back and accidentally stepped on Melissa's feet.

"Sorry."

"It's OK. It didn't hurt much." Her voice was tight and sounded boxed with a distinctive strain to it. Darren was feeling a bunch of mixed emotions. His wife's words kept penetrating his mind, reminding him that he shouldn't be around this woman. He didn't know what was scarier: the things on the train or the fact that his wife would scold him like a petulant child, even when she wasn't there.

"Darren, do you think we can get out of this alive?" Melissa had spoken so out of the blue it startled Darren from his thoughts.

"That is what we're doing. We are going to get off this damn train and notify the authorities. I promise." Darren could hear his words, and even he thought he sounded skeptical. No matter how much he tried to sugar coat it, he knew he was trying to persuade himself as much her.

The lights came flickering back on, and Darren launched into action. He pushed opened the door, and this time didn't tell Melissa to stay. She stayed behind with the door separating them. She looked through the circular window and watched with thunderous heartbeats pounding inside of her ears. When Darren pulled the door open, she practically fell into his chest. She righted herself but made no excuses. They walked quickly down the middle together and came to the last car door. Darren peered through and could see the engineer's room with nothing between them but the open space and wind. Darren opened the door and took a step forward.

Darren's mind sped like a roller-coaster as the wind slapped him hard causing his eyes to water. The train was moving too fast and this worried Darren. He already knew they hadn't made any stops and now he was seeing for himself just how fast the train was moving.

"Stay here, Melissa."

"OK," she winced.

Darren stood on the platform, not really sure of what he was doing. He could see the circular window into the engineer's room but couldn't see past that. He took a precarious step forward and stopped quickly to regain his balance, looking like a poised ballerina. He looked down and couldn't see anything but blackness. There was not a single light to show his surroundings, and he wondered just how high off the ground he was. He hoped he didn't fall. He shook the thoughts from his mind and focused on getting to the other side. He reached over to the guardrail and steadied himself before taking two larger

steps. With his hands on the engineer's door he peered through the window. He could see the gray overalls of the conductor. As he went to pull the handle to open the door, the conductor turned quickly and revealed the manifestation of Death. Darren almost fell off the platform. His hand pulled down the handle, and he instantly panicked, thinking to himself he'd just let the thing out. But the door was locked. His left foot slipped to the side. He grabbed the railing and pulled his foot back up. He took a long deep breath before looking back through the window.

When he did he was staring into the face of what used to be the conductor. Deep black eyes starred back at him. A bloody hand pounded on the window, threatening to smash it with the force of his hits. Darren was so taken aback he felt like he was having an out of body experience. Everything around him turned to gray, and a dizzy feeling washed over him. He backed up, retracing his steps carefully, but he couldn't remember doing any of it. He just remembered being back inside the car and having Melissa yelling at him.

"Damn it, Darren! Snap out of it. Please, Darren. Wake up!"

Melissa slapped Darren across the face and quickly withdrew her hand and held it behind her back.

"Come on, Darren. Please wake up!"

Darren stood on shaky legs. He knew their fate. They were not starring in some big budget movie. This wasn't a nightmare. This was reality, and he knew what would happen. With no one driving the train they would crash. If they were lucky enough to survive the crash they would have to avoid the things that wanted to eat them. He knew that and all he could do was stand there frozen. Eventually he came around, and when he did Melissa took in several gulps of air before she slapped him across the shoulder with anger for him leaving her like that.

"I'm sorry, Melissa. It isn't good news. We're gonna crash. We are probably going to die." He spoke coldly and without emotion.

"Why are you being so pessimistic? You said you'd save me. So save me!"

"What the hell do you expect me to do? It isn't like I can gain access to the controls. Not with that thing in there."

"There has to be something. What about emergency breaks?"

Darren wanted to bash his own brains in right then and there. For a woman who was more terrified than a child being whooped, he couldn't believe she had the smarts to remember something that he himself should have. He cursed himself while looking around for the emergency breaks. He spotted the bright red handle with a placard stuck to the wall above, in big bold words it read 'Emergency Brake.'

“You better sit down and hold on tight.” Darren watched Melissa get into a seat and hold onto the railing. Then he grabbed a hold of the handle and pulled. A loud hissing and scraping sound vibrated through the floor and into the room, like fingernails down a chalk board. The train jerked forward but carried on at the speed it was going. The emergency brake failed. Darren didn’t know if he’d done something wrong so pulled the handle back and forward three more times. It still it didn’t stop the train.

He slumped to the floor in a crumbled heap and didn’t know what to do. Melissa looked blankly at him with more tears washing down her cheeks. Darren got up and walked to the wall on the right side of the train and shone his cell phone torch at the map. He attained it proved useless because he couldn’t know what stations they had passed. He had no idea when the train would crash. He pulled himself into a window seat and stared out into the darkness. Defeated, he started to pound the wall next to the window with a closed fist. He didn’t stop until his knuckles split and blood poured out.

“What are we going to do, Darren?”

“Pray for a miracle. Brace yourself for the crash that will happen. I just can’t tell you when.”

“What about jumping from there?” Melissa pointed to the door that led to the engineer’s room. Darren jumped up and rushed to the door, then yanked it open and looked out. He couldn’t see anything but darkness. He shone his cell phone light below him and couldn’t see much of anything. He couldn’t even make out where they were with the speed at which they were travelling. Everything underneath looked too blurry to make out. He rushed back to the wall of the map and searched it. He did some quick estimation of their speed, and then calculated the time they’d been riding. Double checking his figures in his head, he came up with a reasonable ball park of their location. If his calculations were correct they were heading toward the second to last station: Nile Station. He reached deeply into his mind and tried to picture that station. When he did, his eyes lit up and he grabbed Melissa’s hand roughly and dragged her to the door.

“What is it?” she squealed.

“We’re gonna jump. It is not going to be easy and we may break a few bones, but at least we will survive this fucking train crashing. It is flat out there. I’m pretty sure my calculations are correct and we’re coming up fast on Nile Station. We have to do it now.”

“I don’t think I can do it!”

“Yes, you can. You want to survive, right?”

“Yes, but I’m scared.’

“So am I.” Darren grabbed Melissa around the waist and made a jump for it. It was so unexpected that she had no chance to prepare herself. They went flying out of the train and hit the stony ground just a hair’s breadth from the rail lines. They rolled into a ditch. Darren felt something warm running down his forehead and reached up to touch it. He brought his bloody fingers to his face and he could see he’d hit his head, although he didn’t feel any pain. He looked over to Melissa and noticed her body was curled inwards and she was moaning.

“Are you OK?”

“I ... I think so. I think I twisted my wrist but nothing feels broken. Are you OK?”

“Just a head wound. But otherwise yeah, I think I’m OK.”

Darren brought out his cell phone and turned the torch light on just in time to see Melissa’s fisted hand as she punched him in his chest.

“What the fuck was that for?”

“I didn’t want to jump. You pushed me out of the fucking train and now I’m all cut up.”

Darren burst into laughter. It was contagious and both of them laughed for a minute before Darren heard a strange noise. He shone the cell phone light toward the noise and saw things moving fast toward them. He didn’t speak; instead he got up too fast and had to shake off the threatening vertigo. When he did, he grabbed Melissa to her feet and took off running.

“What are you doing?”

“Things... More of those damn mutants from the train. They are down there. We gotta keep moving.”

Darren ran with Melissa and came across the carpark for the Nile Station. He rushed in and up the ramp, dragging Melissa through without stopping for a breath. A few cars were still parked. Darren had an idea. He stopped and motioned toward one of the cars. He broke in and hot-wired it just as a group of those things headed toward them.

“Get in the fucking car.”

Melissa got in and Darren took off. He ran right into the things and kept on going. He didn’t know where he was headed at first, but the urgency grew and he had a destination in mind. As he drove through the little area of Nile, both he and Melissa discovered that those things were everywhere.

“Where are we going to go?”

“I’m going to get my wife,” Darren snarled and drove with resoluteness. When he finally reached his house, he rushed inside only to discover his wife was no longer his wife. He fell to his knees and hit the floor hard with his knuckles. Tears ran down his cheeks and he screamed out, “W*hy?”* over and

over. He looked up and watched his wife briefly. She was stuck outside on the patio, pacing from pool side to the large lounge windows. She could smell Darren and Melissa but she had no idea how to get back inside her house to get at them. Melissa tried to drag Darren back up, but she had no strength to pull him to his feet. She knelt down beside him and just let him sob for almost an hour.

"We really gotta go Darren. Please."

"Why?"

"Because we will die."

"What's the point? My life is fucking dead without her. Don't you get it...DEAD!"

Melissa didn't know what to do. She stood up and rubbed her aching knees. She looked at Darren's dead wife walking aimlessly yet aggressively into the window, and she wondered how long that window would hold. She raced into the kitchen and gabbed a cool glass of cold water and took it to Darren.

"Drink this and then let's get the hell out of here. I don't want to end up like them! Please, Darren!"

Darren looked up and watched his wife hitting the window and something snapped inside of his head. He snatched the glass of water from Melissa and angrily tossed it hard toward the window. It hit the tall dark-stained oak cabinet, smashing the glass and spilling the water. Melissa jumped with the sudden glass smashing and turned to see Darren's wife thrusting her body viciously into the lounge window.

"What the hell, Darren? She's gonna break through. Let's go now!"

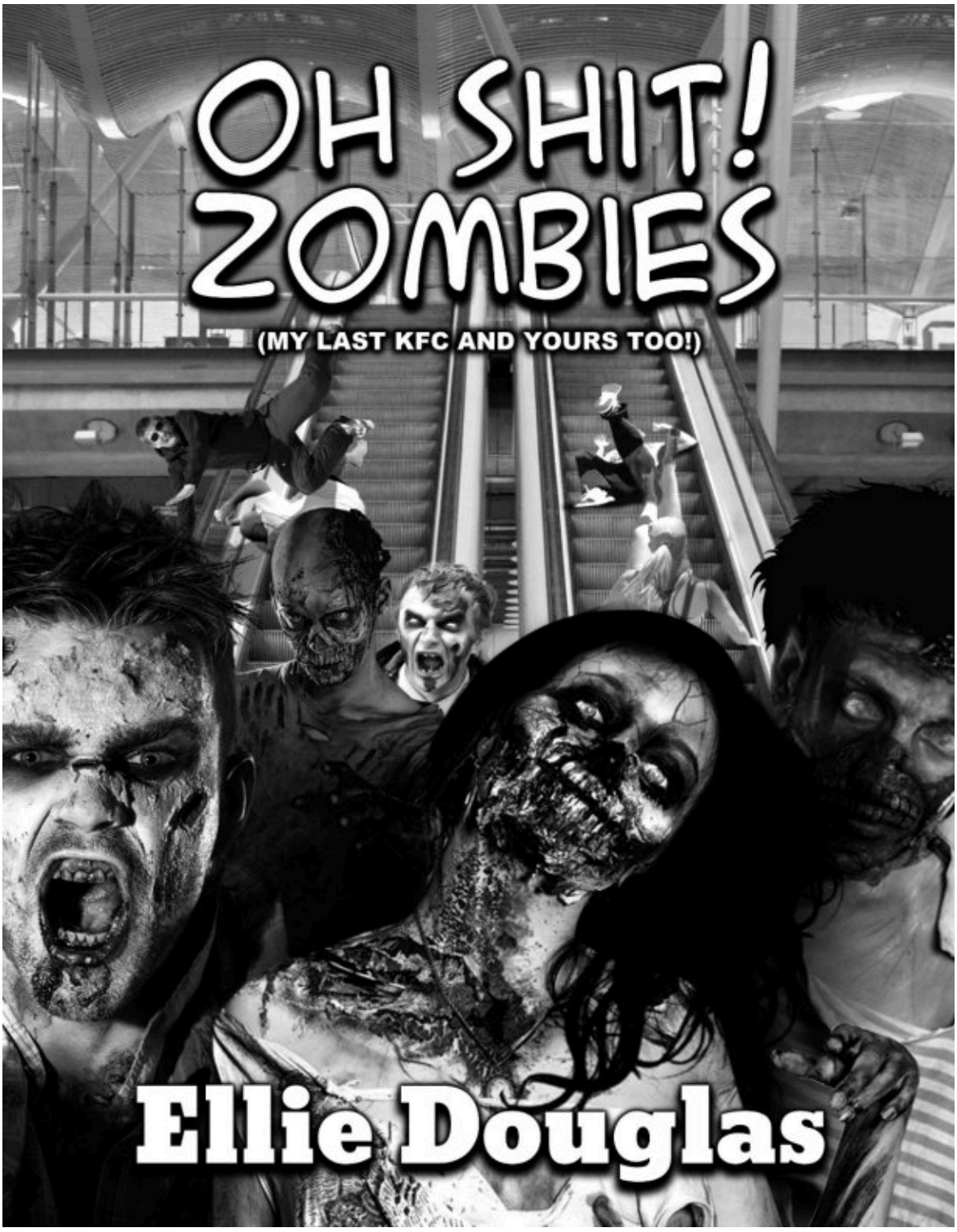
Darren was torn between loss and the reality of the situation. He knew he had to leave but something held him back. There was something about the way his wife bashed her head into the thick glass window to the way she looked at him with her black eyes. She was judging him, even as a dead monster she was still judging him. He was in their house with another woman and he froze. Unexpectedly, Melissa slapped him across the face. *It worked.* He snapped back into the present moment. He uttered, "Sorry," then walked into the large hallway and at the entrance foyer he grabbed his car keys.

"We're taking my Mercedes," he managed to say between bouts of sniffing up excess mucus.

Melissa didn't care what they took, so long as they got out of there. Her nerves were kicking in and she was on edge. She was unsure of anything and everything. Once they got into his dark blue Mercedes and she'd buckled up, the tears flowed freely and she couldn't stop sobbing.

Darren had drowned her out, his thoughts on his wife, his house, his job. How everything was no more. He gave one more fleeting look at his house and then he drove away with purpose but without direction. He didn't know where he was going. He just drove.

The end


OH SHIT!
ZOMBIES
(MY LAST KFC AND YOURS TOO!)
Ellie Douglas

# OH SHIT! ZOMBIES

(My Last KFC and yours too...)

# It Was an Ordinary Day Until...

It wasn't supposed to happen this way...fuck it! I'd just taken the kids to the mall and my son and I ordered KFC while my twin girls had Japanese. So, we were sitting there enjoying our food. Trust me when I say that it was good. That crunchy coating on the chicken I was gnawing on could have put me in damn KFC heaven. So, there I am savoring the last bit of the second piece of chicken when a collective bunch of screaming breaks out right behind me.

I have KFC grease dripping down my chin, and my hands are coated in it. I want to suck my fingers clean, but I have this pet peeve. OK, I have a few of them, but don't judge me. If you get to be my age without so much as a single pet peeve I will personally lick your feet. This particular pet peeve is about having any disruption during my *KFC eating*. I like to savor the flavors, take my time, and damn it, at the end I like to suck my fingers dry. So now I have to walk around, or in this case run around, with this shit all over my fucking fingers. Why? Because the world just filled up with fucking Zombies, or as I like to call them, biters.

OK, anyways, back to the screaming. So here we are, sitting at the food court with at least four dozen others scattered around enjoying their meals as well. What happens? I'm getting to that, be patient – I'm a rambler. I go off subject a fair bit, like just now.

Shit...where was I? Oh, I know. OK, so we're eating and then all this godforsaken screaming is going on behind me. I had my back to the escalators that a majority of the public uses to get down to the food court. This isn't your everyday happy screaming. Oh, Lord no! It is shrill nightmarish shrieking. Just imagine being locked in a room with ten Siamangs going nuts, put that on surround sound, and wait for your fucking ears to bleed.

By now, my twin eight year-old girls are screaming. My fifteen year-old son had his mouth wide open and his spectacles only magnified the terror in his eyes. I jolted my head around. Yeah, I regretted that one. Talk about a pain in the neck. I brush a bit of flyaway hair off my forehead, smearing KFC greasy goodness across my face, and briefly think about licking my fingers. But this time, I'm way too distracted.

"Mummy! MUMMY, take us home!" Molly screeches as though she's got her hair caught in the blender, *again*.

My other daughter is now practically sitting on my lap, digging her nails into my arms and screaming in my ear. I don't know whether to place her on

the floor and ground her, or laugh, then cry. Yep, mothers around the world will tell you there ain't nothing pleasant about an eight-year-old climbing on top of you and digging their razor sharp nails in, all the while screaming right into your ear. It's quite possibly the most irritating part of parenting.

Damn it! Off topic again. Anyways, back to it. Yeah, I know. I'm easily distracted.

OK, so I finally turn my head around and what I see makes me unsure if I should be laughing, yelling, puking, or all three. I could literally hear bones breaking. The entire floor was slick with people's guts and torn off limbs. Hell, one girl I saw was walking around with half a face...and so much blood. The floor used to be white, but now it was dark red with chunky shit everywhere. I swear it looked like the worst collective road kill you ever saw!

I think I brought up my heart, then swallowed it again. Let me tell you, it didn't taste pretty. My head was thumping, my heart was pumping, yet I felt a mix of calm and determination. Truthfully, I was pissed that I had just had my last KFC ever! Yours too? Damn.

Lucky for me, I was immune to blood and guts. Well, mostly. Having been exposed to them at my job on a daily basis had made me less squeamish. I'm part of a clean-up crew that goes around cleaning up crime scenes. This, however, was like ten years' worth of every damn crime scene I'd seen poured into one place. The worst part was the stench. It was like stepping into rotten fish. My gaze stretched across the food court, and everywhere my eyes looked was disaster. That's when reality started to finally sink in. All jokes aside, my main priority was to get my kids to safety.

"MUMMY!!!" Emma screamed over and over.

"All right, I'm thinking," I yelled back at her. Not out of anger, mind you. No, it was so I could be heard. There was so much bellowing going on that it was surprising anyone could hear anything.

"MUMMY...MUM!" Both Emma and Molly bawled in unison. A grotesque looking middle-aged man, with his scalp peeled back like the skin of a grape, was reaching for the kids. He was wearing gym shorts and a grey tee-shirt that had holes in it where parts of his bones had poked through. He just sort of stood there with short jittery movements, almost like he was twitching. He was fast, but thankfully his outreached hands and gnashing teeth caught another sorry victim. A teenager got between my daughter and the scalpless-wonder. He immediately sunk his teeth into the young girl's shoulder, tearing her skin and pulling it backwards to free it from her screaking body. Plasma spurted out everywhere. Some even splashed on our table, saturating what was left of the kid's meals.

He went in for more of the teenager, and we watched on, helpless. His tongue was hanging out. Damn it, I swear it was literally swinging around like a fucking pendulum on crack. The drool pouring out the sides of his mouth made him look like a rabid dog.

He went in a third time. By now, this poor girl's arm looked as though she'd put it through an garden shredder. As he nose-dived in for more of her flesh, his drool slobbered in the air as he swung his head and it splattered on the floor an inch from my shoes. It was the grossest thing I have ever seen. This shit was going down.

It was happening right in front of me. It was so fast, I thought I had been standing there for hours watching. In reality, it was just a couple of minutes. I pulled my shit together, grabbed both the girls, and motioned for my son to follow me. We carefully passed the biters in quick succession, avoiding their outstretched arms. Did I mention that they made this horrific groaning noise? Well, they did. It was sick!

I saw my regular hairdressing salon in front, and racing out of the shop entrance was my hairdresser. Another biter was chasing her. She fell down and I was unable to help her. Fuck that! I wanted to help, but my kids came first.

I ran past with my shrilling kids, and we went down a long stretch of corridors. We rushed past the dead, the walking dead, and the body parts. Let us not forget the untold shops we passed in a blur. All my regular shopping boutiques were littered with the dying, or with people jamming themselves in and getting eaten in the process, or being trampled on by others with the same idea. My mind was reeling. *Shopping,* it shouted at me. Go shopping! I snapped back into reality once more and continued dragging the kids towards the other escalator. I had to get to my car. Fuck knows why, but it was all that I could think of at the time.

Half the time I was running and almost tripping. So many bodies littered the floor that it looked like a human dump pile. I couldn't believe my kids were witnessing all of this. Do you have any idea how hard it is to run with three kids? Two of which are relying strictly on your guidance, the other almost tripping over your feet because he is unsure of where to go? Well, picture it.

Everyone is tripping over each other. People bump into one another. You slip on spilled blood and you try not to lose grip of your kids with hundreds of others all going in the damn opposite direction. Not such a cake walk, is it?

A thought entered my mind. "Why haven't we turned into those things?" We must have been immune, somehow. Or would it hit us later? God only

knew. All I know is the question started bugging the hell out of me. Oh, well, no time to ponder on that now.

"Damn it, Mum, which way?" Jayce squealed, sounding more like a girl than I wanted to admit. But he did achieve his goal, which was to bring me back to reality.

"The car."

We raced up the escalator, or at least attempted it. You see, not only were my lungs heaving, but we were also fighting against the tide of living and dead. Hot breath brushed past my body so often that the hairs on my arms and neck remained in erect prickles. We bypassed the many arms trying their hardest to grab at us. Bodies went tumbling down the escalator like human bowling pins. Part of me wanted to help them, but the maternal part of me wanted to get my kids out and to safety. I had no choice but to ignore them and get the hell out of there.

"Fuck off!" I screamed at them, cursing the biters and idiot humans who almost toppled onto us more than once. It was utter mayhem. Everyone left alive was hysterical, and they were all doing the same thing: trying to get out. You can bet I wasn't about to let any vermin near my kids. I pushed through and kept on going in spite of my overtaxed lungs.

Just as we made it to the top of the escalator, a damn waterfall of blood started pouring down from the amount of bodies that had fallen and had been bitten. Have you ever gone slip-n-sliding before? Let me tell you, it is like trying to walk on black ice. Slippery as fuck! Crap, there I go off track, again. Somehow, we made it to the exit doors.

We got out of the mall and were at the opposite end from where I had parked the car. A few other people had made it out, and the biters instantly attacked them. There is nothing worse than witnessing bodies being disemboweled right in front of you. We rushed along the pavement, avoiding out-of-control cars and biters, which seemed to own the damn car park.

Regardless of which way you looked, the biters were there. Some were even stuck in their cars. OK, I admit that I did have a giggle when I saw them smashing their hands and faces trying to find a way out. Come on, admit it; you would have found that amusing as well.

We were all gasping for air. After all, running to avoid death is exhausting. Finally, my car was within sight. Suddenly, my damn throat drops into my lungs and my heart leaps like a jack-in-the box. A fucking biter grabbed Jayce's leg. Could the hairs on my arms get any pricklier? Did you know that goose bumps could actually hurt?

"Let him go, YOU FUCK!"

I dropped the girl's hands, which desperately tried to re-grab mine. I had to ignore them for now. Trust me when I tell you that it was not easy. Two little girls can be as strong and demanding as a pair of wild apes. They were pounding on my legs, clawing at me, screaming to have me carry them, and begging me to keep going. Then they started crying out of control when they saw their brother in trouble. I had no choice but to push them away and go for the bitch who was about to eat my son.

I went straight for the hair of this woman biter who had her mouth open and only inches from my son's thigh. Her mouth was half missing. Seriously, half fucking missing. You could see every tooth. Well, the ones that hadn't been left behind in the bones of her other victims, at least. "Bastard!" I hiss, as I turned into the mother bear of all mothers.

"GET TO THE CAR...NOW!" I demanded to the girls. They looked lost and unsure. "I SAID GO... NOW!"

I yanked the woman's hair so hard that her head popped like a champagne cork. It was just enough leverage for my son to escape her clutches. He didn't need to be told to run. He ran, catching up to his sisters. He grabbed their little sweaty hands and led them to the car. He took a look back and saw me kicking the woman.

Truthfully, I couldn't stop. I didn't want to stop. I was really pissed off. How would you feel if you had some psycho dead thing trying to eat your son? It was as if the insides of her body were replaced with mashed potatoes. She was slippery and soft when I kicked. I heard no bones. NO BREAKING BONES. My foot would almost sink into her blackened flesh and bounce backwards, not doing any visible damage. I could hear things moving inside of her with each kick. Her body sounded like a thick shake being shaken in a steel cup.

"NO ONE TOUCHES MY KIDS YOU FUCKING BITCH!"

It was pointless cursing at her. It wasn't like she understood me.

"MUM, come on. Let us in the car!" begged Jayce.

I stopped kicking the woman, who was still trying to reach up and grab me. I couldn't tear my eyes from her missing flesh. Parts of her arms had loose skin just flapping about with gaping wide, deep holes. The holes were deep enough to see the gray, whitish bone that looked as though the marrow had been replaced with ice cream. She wanted my flesh, but by all that is holy she wasn't going to get it. I started to run off, then turned quickly and gave her another hard kick right in the head. I swear it caved in like a rotten watermelon. I then went toward the car, and damn it, two other biters came out of nowhere and grabbed hold of me.

“Get to safety...GO...Go...Go! Try your father again. HIDE...RUN AND HIDE!” It was all I could get out before I felt teeth gnashing into my ankle, and another sinking his fangs into my right hip. I could feel my skin being torn right through my shirt. I looked down and my blue shirt was now dark, so damn dark it was as if it had been tie-dyed.

“SON OF A BITCH!” I shouted. The pain was un-fucking-believable. “STOP!” I cried out even louder.

Yeah, come on, Rose. As if a simple word would suffice. “Get yourself up and fight,” I heard myself saying, before glancing up and seeing my kids hadn’t obeyed me. They stood there with their little mouths caterwauling holy Sunday hell. I couldn’t let the biters eat my kids. I kicked so hard that the one on my ankle ripped my skin with him as he went tumbling backwards. I was left with a gaping hole the size of two apples. He took muscle with it, and my veins. Oh God! They just sort of rubber-banded outward before snapping. When he finished chewing on my flesh, he stood to come back for more. Lucky for me, another human ran right in his path, and he sunk his teeth into that man’s neck as if he was eating a chop.

Jesus, oh sweet Jesus, the blood was just gushing out and the pain was excruciating. I gritted my teeth and swung my hand on the man that was mincing my hip. I pulled at his tee-shirt until it pulled half way over his head, trapping him within his clothing.

At that moment, I heard a crunching, sickening, wet sound. I knew the biter had a good chunk of my skin in its mouth, and suddenly he and I were playing tug-of-war. I forced my body into a twisted arch, pushing myself off the damn thing. When I finally broke free, all I could see was this male biter with half his head covered in his own tee-shirt chomping away on my flesh.

He chewed it for a moment, then swallowed. Then he made a grunting sound before searching for more of my skin. I practically leapt backwards a good three feet. I managed to stand up, with one hand on my hip trying to stop the excessive bleeding while the other fished in my bag for the car keys. I swear my lungs were on fire. The tightness of my ribs gripped around my heart. I felt as though a vampire had his hands around my heart and was slowly squeezing the life out of me.

I surprised myself. I made it to the car, got the kids in, and then myself. Everyone suddenly jumped and screamed, myself included. Another biter had smashed her way against the side of the passenger door. Emma and Molly wouldn’t stop screaming. Jayce sat in silence at first. Then he let out a massive long, loud, piercing shriek.

"Mum, get us the fuck out of here! Mum! Mum...Why are you laughing?"

I couldn't answer him through the tears of laughter. It was the first time I had ever heard him swear, and well, he just sounded way too young and clumsy. Of course, I have to give him credit for using the word in the grammatically appropriate way.

Yes, I know, I'm off track again. Shit for brains. My head is a mess, all right? OK, so I got the car going, bowling over the biters as we left the car park, albeit, not unscathed. I sideswiped and smashed into multiple cars on the way out. I went through red lights and ran over biters, barely missing panicked people running for their lives. It was worse than the Running of the Bulls in Spain.

People were clambering over one another. Cars were playing smash-em-up-derby, and I really had doubts that we would make it home. My car. Jesus, my sweet, sweet car. It was bathed in intestinal juices, brain matter, blood, and guts. We felt everything, and I mean *everything*! By the time we got down our street, the stuff had spread across every inch of my car. It looked like congealed custard. *So gross!*

Finally, we got home. The kids raced inside and I stumbled in after them. Jayce locked everything up good and tight. He rushed around the house drawing the drapes and closing all the windows. My girls were checking me over. How ironic, right? I'm supposed to worry about them and here they were concerned for me. I must admit, I did look a terrifying mess. My hip had oozed out so much crimson liquid that it ran down my leg, and my ankle was no better. I swear I could see the white bit of bone within my ankle. Damn, my hip and ankle looked like gooey shredded buckwheat.

I grabbed the first-aid kit and did my best to bandage myself up, keeping a brave face so as not to panic the girls. I told all three to go lock themselves in their rooms. Jayce's job was to keep trying to reach his father. I *hate* it when I can't get hold of him, and trust me, Steve is impossible to get hold of. I started to feel queasy and very sleepy.

"Mum, I still can't get hold of Dad."

"Just keep trying," I said through gritted teeth.

Some hours passed. I had fallen asleep. I thought I was dead. Turns out, I was, but just didn't know it yet. Everything was quiet. Even the screaming had stopped. The pain had stopped. I smelled them. I knew fresh blood was somewhere in the house. I pulled myself up and shuffled my feet across the

carpeted lounge, eager for fresh meat. My legs were wobbling around the place and looked like jelly. Hell, if a gust of wind passed, I'd be flat on my back.

I sniffed hard. My throat was making a guttural sound. Then I sniffed even harder as I drew closer to the delicious metallic smell of fresh meat. Grunting loudly, I carried on towards the heavy aroma of blood. I was like the kids following the damned pied-piper: unstoppable. Moaning, I came to a door that I couldn't open. I just stared at it dumbfounded. I seemed to have lost the ability or know-how to do a simple task like open a door. I slammed my body into it, acting as if the door wasn't there. I slammed it harder and faster. Then I heard crying behind the door, then soft moaning. I stopped slamming my body and listened for a moment.

"Mummy, is that you?"

The End

NO MORE
COOCHY COOCHY COO!
ELLIE DOUGLAS

# NO MORE COOCHY COOCHY COO!

# Abort...Abort...There Are Children On Board

“Shit, what the fuck? Is there a tornado coming?” Samantha screeched between contractions.

“No, don’t worry, it is just a civil defense test. They do them sometimes,” Nurse Betty Sanders said in a calm way. Her eyes gravitated to Dr. Michael Staunch, but he couldn’t see because his head was between Samantha’s legs.

“Where the hell is Jeff?” Samantha hissed as another contraction enveloped her. “You did call him, right?”

“I promise you, Sam, I called him. Try not to worry. He will be here.”

“He is ADHD, so please call him again. Please!”

“I already rang him four times. I promise you he is on his way.”

“But the baby, I can feel it. It’s coming,” she said louder this time.

Michael lifted up his head briefly, his eyes directly on Nurse Betty. Both of them were concerned about the air-raid siren, but neither of them could stop the birth of Samantha’s baby.

“You are fully dilated, but the baby is breech, so I’m going to have to turn her around.”

“Oh, God, no, please!”

“Sam, it will be OK,” Nurse Betty said as she placed her gloved hand across Samantha’s shoulder. She could feel the tense strain beneath her palm.

“OH GOD!” Samantha howled as she felt the doctor’s hands enter her. “Oh fuck that hurts, please stop.”

“He can’t stop, Samantha. He needs to turn your baby. It’ll all be over with soon.”

“Soon? Are you fucking kidding me? It’s already been sixteen hours. Where the fuck is JEFF?”

Samantha kept screaming, temporarily drowning out the siren.

“Get it out! Something’s wrong! GET IT OUT!”

Nurse Betty tried her best to calm Samantha down, but couldn’t. The terror in Samantha’s face told Betty it was more than just birthing pain. She

looked to Dr. Michael, slipped her hand onto his shoulder, and shook him a little to gain his attention.

"What is it?" he husked. "Can't you see I'm busy?"

"Yes, but...it's Samantha. She's very distressed. Shouldn't we give her an epidural?"

"No, there is no time." Down his head went again. His hands were buried deep inside of Samantha and her high-pitched shouting only grew louder and louder. He got the baby turned around, but it seemed unwilling to proceed.

"If you don't get this baby out of me... I will kill you... KILL YOU ALL!" She howled. Shhhit. FUCK. FUCK. FUCK. JESUS FUCKING CHRIST, IT'S EATING ME!"

"Please, Samantha, calm down. You aren't being eaten from the inside. It might feel like it..."

"Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow!" Samantha howled. "It's biting me! Arggh!"

"It isn't biting you," Nurse Betty insisted.

"Holy fucking shit," came a muffled voice from the doctor.

"What the..." Nurse Betty screamed as she watched Dr. Michael's head being pulled down as if something was pulling him into Samantha's opening. His screams were muffled and his body shook violently.

"What the hell is going on?" Samantha demanded, sitting up and looking as far forward as she could. However, her belly was so big that she couldn't see past it. Her legs jolted in the stirrups, cramping her calf muscles as she felt the pulling and pushing inside of her.

"Is it out? I don't feel the biting anymore."

"Um...Um... NO!" Nurse Betty said as she pulled on her blonde short ponytail. Her face paled to match the color of her bleached hair. She stumbled backwards, knocking over the medical tray. Surgical equipment went splattering across the white tiled floor with a loud crash.

"Hey, what are you doing? What's going on?" Samantha demanded while trying to get her legs out of the stirrups. DOCTOR, TALK TO ME!" She yelled. Her eyes peeked over her belly. She could only see Dr. Michael's shoulders. His back was jiggling around like Jell-O. Out of nowhere, Dr. Michael's head pulled out from between Samantha's legs, screaming.

"Fuck ME! It has my fucking fingers. Get this cock-sucking thing off of me!" Dr. Michael yelled.

Nurse Betty moved slowly towards the table. The closer she got, the worse the smell got. She hadn't noticed how quiet Samantha had gotten. Betty's focus was on getting the doctor out. She stepped closer, peered her head over, and was suddenly sprayed with gore. It covered her face and chest.

She used the back of her hand to wipe her eyes clear, unable to shut her mouth as the startled receptors took over. She just stood there splattered in dark red blood with her mouth wide open.

What felt like hours was only a few seconds. She looked down to see three fingers on the floor to the left of the doctor. To the right of him was his nose, or what remained of it. Betty turned her head and vomited. She heard a murmur and instinctively looked up toward Samantha, and then back to the Doctor.

The most grotesque pair of baby hands was pulling at the Doctor's head, scalping him as it drew bits of him inside of Samantha's pussy. Betty had to look twice, because at first, she didn't believe it. When she looked closer, she believed it. The Doctor's brain was exposed and was covered with bite marks.

"Dear God! Oh, sweet baby Jesus. Get me out of here and I promise you I will stop screwing around with the doctors. Just get me the hell out of here!" Betty screeched.

Betty swung her body around to check on Samantha as the need to save her and get out overtook her. She rushed to the side of the hospital bed.

"Come on, Samantha, we have to go. Wake up. Wake UP!"

Betty put her small hands on Samantha's shoulders and shook her as hard as she could. Samantha started to dribble. First, it was a little, but then it turned into a lot. Frothy, foamy stuff erupted from her parted lips as one eye flung open. Her eye revealed nothing but a milky whiteness. Betty waved her hands in front of Samantha and got no response. She got a little closer and felt the hairs on her neck prickle. She reached down and grabbed Samantha's wrist, and took her pulse.

"Sweet Jesus Christ, it can't be. You have no fucking pulse." She shook her again and again, but still got no response. "Fuck!" She screamed as she backed out toward the door. She had not noticed before, but there was a lot of screaming going on outside of the room. She turned to glance through it, but couldn't see through the frosted little window. She pushed the door open and poked her head out a few inches. Babies at the other end of the

hallway were heard wailing while people's screams echoed loudly everywhere.

Two, then three, then five people covered in blood ran past her, screaming for their lives. When Betty turned to see what they were running from, she vomited again. She pulled her head back inside the door and closed it. Her heart was racing and she couldn't catch her breath.

What she saw would stain her vision for the rest of her life. A pregnant woman was hobbling along with a baby between her legs swinging off the umbilical cord like a broken pendulum. They were dead, but they were also *alive*. The baby made a sickening, greedy, suckling sound.

"It can't be!" she howled. Gathering her strength, she opened the door and peered through the gap again. A man, covered in pustule sores mixed with what looked like gangrenous blood, ambled down the hallway.

Betty shook her head in disbelief. Once more watching the hallway like a stalked, she gathered her strength. More and more bodies with the same look waddled through. One spotted her and made his way toward her. She watched until he was four feet from her. She quickly pushed the door closed and stood with her back pressed against it.

Suddenly, the door rocked and rumbled sending vibrations through Betty's back. She jumped in a start but couldn't remove herself from the door. The thing outside was pushing his body repeatedly into the metal barrier, smashing it harder and harder with a grunting noise unlike anything Betty had ever heard.

# Half An Hour Before Shit Hit the Fan!

“Excuse me, can you tell me how to find my wife?”

“Name?”

“Jeffery... pickle juice.”

“What? Your name is Jeffery Pickle Juice?”

“No, sorry. I was thinking of what it was my wife wanted me to bring her. I think it was pickle juice, or maybe it was sardine juice? Damn it...I forgot. Sorry, what were you saying?”

“Name? What is your name?” the tiny brunette asked, clearly irritated yet amused by Jeffery.

“Jeffery Baxter, the wife is Samantha. It’s our first baby. Man, she’s going to be so pissed at me. I’m not only late, but I can’t remember what she wanted.”

Jeffery watched the nurse behind the counter. She was looking at the computer monitor and didn’t look up for some time.

“Can’t you find her?”

The nurse held up a finger, indicating for Jeffery to wait. He hated waiting. He started drumming his fingers across the tabletop, rhythmically beating his fingers to the tune of *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*.

“She is one floor up. Go past the maternity ward on the left here, then make a sharp right. Take the stairs up one flight, or if you prefer, use the elevator. Is there anything else I can help you with?”

“No, thanks.” Jeffery was gone before the nurse had even lifted her eyes from the computer monitor. She giggled before carrying on with her work. The name Pickle Juice continued to flash in her mind, making her giggle a little more.

Jeffery picked up his pace and followed the corridor. He could hear some babies cooing and some crying. He couldn’t help but stop outside the nursery. His gaze peeped through the window. Several babies were in that room. Each one looked as cute as the next, he thought to himself.

The nursery wallpaper was a dull blue and pink combination with a variety of baby animals, rabbits, white fluffy lambs, kittens, and puppies. There were rainbows in the distance with each end covered by clouds that looked like cotton candy. The ceiling above was a blue sky with more cotton candy looking clouds.

He placed his right hand on the window, pressing his palm down and spreading his fingers wide. His eyes fell on two of the closest babies and he wondered why they were so grey looking. Then he noticed the sores poking out near the very top of the blankets. The babies appeared distressed, but their cries

were not those of normal babies. Even through the walls and window, he could tell something was horribly wrong.

He casually wandered in, well aware that he would be unable to live with himself if he were to ignore it and something was wrong with those babies. The room was warmer than the other rooms and filled Jeffery with a sunshine-like feeling he never knew existed in the world. He couldn't wait to see and hold his own baby daughter.

A hefty nurse with short spikey hair was attending a baby on the far right of the room. Another nurse with bright red hair was in the middle, attending to one of the incubators, and a third nurse was changing a baby.

Jeffery made his way to the two babies. On his way, he briefly stopped to look at one that he thought he was super cute. Soft light brown hair sat atop his head, and he had bright blue eyes. Jeffery could have sworn he was smiling at him. Jeffery lifted his hands to his face and quietly said, "Coochy coochy coo, you are so adorable."

He pulled himself away, walked over to the two babies in front of the window, and carefully peered into the tiny cribs that they were in. The noises from those babies were very different from that of the others. There was no cooing, and no gabbling. Instead, intense animal growling and hungry grunts escaped their little lips.

"Is one of those yours?" The nurse with bright red hair called out to Jeffery.

"No, sorry, I was walking past and noticed something odd about these two in the front."

"Let me put this one down and I'll come check them out," the friendly nurse said. She finished with the baby, wrapped it up in a yellow blanket, and then carefully laid it down in its crib. She walked over to Jeffery and he showed her the two babies he was concerned about.

"Thank you. You have a good eye. I'll take it from here." She was so calm, thought Jeffery. He watched her carefully. She stepped away from the babies and walked to a small corner desk, reached over the top, and pulled out a telephone. She dialed something, and then spoke very calmly. "Doctor Philips, you are needed in the nursery, STAT."

Jeffery stayed in the room. He'd not been ordered out yet, and he wanted to ensure that those babies would be taken care of. He puttered around the room, offering a hand to one of the other nurses, who was changing the diaper of one twin while the other was waiting to be bottle-fed.

"Thank you, but it is best that only the nurses and parents handle the newborns. Is your baby in here?"

“Not yet. My wife is about to deliver. I’m on my way to her now. She won’t mind when I tell her where I’ve been. I want to help. Are you sure there isn’t anything I can do?”

“Sorry, sir, but there isn’t. Please don’t touch the babies.”

“I promise I won’t. I’m just waiting for the other nurse. Ignore me like I’m not even here. I’ll be as quiet as a mouse and you won’t even notice me.” Jeffery smiled big and tiptoed around the large room.

There were twenty-three babies along with two sets of twins in there. He was fascinated with how similar yet different each baby was. Some had dark thick hair, some had light wispy bits of fluff for hair, and some had none at all. Most of the babies were sleeping or cooing. He felt a warm pang rise up his spine. The very idea that he would soon be holding his own baby radiated through him like a live wire of joy.

“Doctor Philips, thank you for coming. Please check these two babies out. I fear something is wrong with them.” Doctor Philips followed nurse Katarina and examined the first baby, then the second. Jeffery noticed the look across the doctor’s face. He looked fearful and astounded at the same time. He was a stocky, short fellow with a thin moustache, bushy eyebrows, and a huge Roman nose. He looked to be in his early fifties, thought Jeffery, who had now walked over to where the sick babies were. He wanted to hear what was wrong with them.

“Katarina, you better get Doctor Rockett and get these babies out of this room immediately. Put them into isolation. I saw an empty room two doors down, so put them there. Please.”

“Hey, are they contagious?”

“Are you the father?”

“No.”

“Uncle?”

“No.”

“Relative of any kind?”

“No.”

“Then I can’t tell you anything. Please stand aside and let us do our job.”

“OK, but if they are contagious, I have a right to know. What if they infect the other babies in here or infect the staff? Then what?”

“Look, I don’t know who you are or why you are even in here, but if you don’t get out of my way I will call security.”

“Gee! OK, but when my baby is born, she isn’t coming into this ward.” Jeffery huffed as he stood back and let the nurse take the babies away, giving him a close up view. The skin on both of the babies looked transparent in parts

and blisters had erupted across their tiny little arms, legs, and faces. They had their eyes open but they were covered in some kind of white looking film.

Jeffery couldn't get the noises that they made out of his head. He stood there watching the red-headed nurse take the babies out as the stocky doctor followed her while he spoke on his cell phone. Jeffery couldn't hear who he was talking to, but what he heard wasn't good.

He rushed out of the room and was suddenly disorientated. He didn't know which way to go, nor did he remember how to get to his wife's room. He went right and ended up back at the same reception area of the maternity ward where he started. Frustrated and too embarrassed to ask the same nurse for directions, he went out of the room and made a sharp right, ending up in the cafeteria. Distracted by the smells, he ordered himself a coffee and muffin. Then he sat down to eat and drink as if he had all the time in the world.

He looked at the people coming and going. Some were looking grey like the babies. It didn't register for a few minutes, but then he suddenly realized that whatever those babies had, they weren't alone.

Jeffery counted ten people in that cafeteria with the same kind of translucent skin with infected looking sores and the unmistakable white clouded eyes. They groaned and didn't make full words. It was still baffling him, until one of them grabbed the person closest to him and bit right into his shoulder. The blood burst from his shoulder and pooled across his white shirt. Jeffery couldn't take his eyes off the unfolding carnage. The thing had its mouth back over the shoulder, tearing and pulling more flesh from the man.

A scream from behind got his attention. He turned to see a woman grasping at her hand where a finger was missing. Jeffery looked up to see her child chowing down on it like a chicken bone. Beside them another thing leapt into action, attacking a man in a business suit. The thing's mouth latched onto his nose, pulling half of it off in a vicious attack. It reminded Jeffery of the wild coyote he'd seen attacking the neighbor's cat. The man shook like a vibrator, his eyes fully dilated, his left hand searching his face for anything broken while his right hand pulled off the other loose piece of his nose. It came away wet with blood. The fright in his eyes pulled Jeffery up. He wanted to help.

Before Jeffery could really comprehended what was going on around him, a pair of wayward arms reached for him. He leaned back toward his table and picked up the half cup of coffee, throwing it over the thing and then running out of the cafeteria.

Suddenly, an air-raid siren went off outside. People were screaming everywhere and running in different directions. Some were trampled as they had

fallen and were unable to get up. More of those monsters were popping up as if from nowhere.

Bright splashes of deep red blood that sprinkled in every direction filled his vision. The once white walls now resembled a bloodbath of red gunk mixed with chunky bits of chewed up flesh and bone. The floor, once polished, was now colored bright red and was slippery as if it was coated in oil. A chorus of bloodcurdling screams filled his hears.

Jeffery was having a hard time comprehending what he was seeing. He thought he was in a movie and waited to hear for the director to yell cut, but nothing like that happened. He wandered off at a fast pace, avoiding the many infected. At this point his only mission was to get to his wife.

He found his way back to the reception area, but wished he hadn't. The woman, who hadn't even looked up from her computer monitor earlier, was now sitting with her head leaning back against the chair as if it had been broken by a grizzly bear. Her throat had been torn out, which had left a huge gaping hole. Jeffery could see her muscles and the white bone protruding outward with her veins and arteries mingled in. Bright red liquid had run down her chest and puddled on the floor beneath her.

Jeffrey backed out, went down another corridor, and found the stairwell. He pulled the door open and rushed up the stairs, passing two dead bodies and one infected. Solid chunks of raw meat were dropping to the floor as if a butcher was tossing aside the offcuts. He was stunned by his ability to avoid the things that were attacking. He reached the top of the stairs and pushed the stairwell door. When it opened, the smell of death hit him so hard that he stumbled backwards. He fumbled to right himself, not wanting one of those things lurking in the stairwell to eat him.

He looked left, then right, and both sides were equally catastrophic. Each way he looked he was witness to death. People were being torn apart and eaten alive. The corridors had filled fast. One child, about eight years old, was screaming in the middle of the hall, when suddenly panicked people rushed past and knocked him to the floor, trampling him. Jeffery could hear his bones breaking, and there was nothing he could do.

The next to walk down that corridor was four of those things. One fell to his knees and took one leg from the dying child. Its back humped upwards as its mouth tore out veins as if it was eating spaghetti. It dragged the child's veins and flesh outward, feverishly ripping it from his little leg. One final muffled scream from the boy erupted before he died.

Without even noticing, the thing just kept eating him. Now covered in the child's bloody flesh, it stuck its face up as if to suck air in before it dove back

down and started on the other leg. The thing gnawed on the child's limb like it was a turkey bone. The other three things kept moving forward. Jeffery could see their noses sniffing the air like animals.

More bloodcurdling screams could be heard from every direction. Glass was being broken, and tables and chairs were toppled over. A pregnant patient appeared, her belly cut wide open. An obvious C-Section that didn't get finished, thought Jeffery. She walked the corridor with her baby hanging out of her split abdomen, looking like a saturated alien still half in its amniotic sac.

Jeffery couldn't believe she still had the surgical clips swaying off each side of her loose flesh. He wanted to be sick. The smell alone penetrated deep inside his nose. His guts churned, his eyes watered, and his heart felt as though he'd swallowed it. Jeffery pushed onward. His eyes landed on the polished linoleum floor and he saw fresh blood had splattered it. Following the trail, his eyes fell on another patient, this one naked from the waist up. When she turned around, he was flummoxed by what he saw.

Both the naked woman and her baby had turned into those things. At the time, he guessed, the baby was nursing on her breast when whatever went wrong in the world had changed them. It had now eaten right through her breast and into her ribcage. It was barely hanging onto her skin. If it weren't for the hole in her chest that its feet were hooked into, it would have been on the floor.

Jeffery cringed while his body shook. He felt the acid in his stomach settle at the back of his throat. Jeffery called out his wife's name, but over the siren and the people's screams he wasn't heard.

He started to search that floor, room by room. He pulled doors open and rushed in, leaving frantically after each glimpse of the carnage. Women who were giving birth were now dead with dead things hanging out between their legs still attached by the umbilical cord. The horrific animal sounds those things made churned his stomach juice into a volatile acid-bath. The burning rising, he could even feel it inside his nostrils.

Finally, behind the seventh door he pulled open, he found his wife. A doctor was dead between her legs. The baby was eating his back after having eaten through the skull and brain.

"No!" Cried Jeffery, the world suddenly speeding up again with a fine mist of bright red blood erupting from the doctor's back. "NO! NO! NO! Jesus. Not my wife too!"

His wife was almost transparent like the others. Her skin had erupted in pus filled sores that looked ready to explode. She wasn't responding to his voice. He got closer and shook her, yet she didn't respond. He leaned down. As he went to kiss her forehead goodbye, a lone tear rolled off his cheek and landed on her

cracked lips. His eyes were closed, so he had not seen her opening her eyes and reaching her decaying hands up, but he felt the movement. At that moment, he thought he had been given a second chance. He opened his eyes in time to see her mouth gaped wide and the hunger lust in her eyes. Her teeth sank right into his cheek with a crunchy, slobbering, wet sound.

Jeffery pulled himself free. He could see the stringy veins briefly before they snapped free from his face, leaving his wife with a mouthful of his flesh, muscle and veins. He grabbed hold of his cheek while backing up further. Spinning on his heels, he tried to leave the room when he felt another set of teeth sinking into his ankle. He jolted, kicked out, and slammed his boot into the head of Nurse Betty. She refused to let go of his ankle. He could see a shower of blood splashing the nurse. He pulled harder and harder until he got free from her mouth. Nurse Betty had a chunk of his flesh and chewed on it as if enjoying a Sunday roast.

"You disgusting bitch!" he said, kicking her right in the mouth. She went spiraling backwards, and then sprang back into a sitting position still chomping down on his flesh. She looked eager for more.

"Fuck you and die!" he yelled with a harder kick. He was sure he had broken her neck, only to realize he hadn't when she sprang back up again.

Jeffery raced out of the room, found the stairwell again, ran down to the exit and out of the hospital. The entrance was littered with limbs and colored dark red. The sun had started to congeal the blood, making it crusted and giving it the look of rotten cottage cheese. Jeffery rushed through, and like a linebacker, he pushed everyone out of his way. He kept running down the concrete stairs, across the lawn, and into the parking lot. He tried his best to ignore the many bodies and screaming survivors. All he wanted was to get out. His determination made the pain from his ankle disappear, at least for now.

He found his car, got in, and tore up the road, smoking the tires while bolting out of there. He didn't know where he was going. The roads were filled with crashed cars and body parts. More red liquid covered the ground, as if it had been raining blood. His heart ached, and his head felt as though someone was pounding on him with a baseball bat.

As he drove away, his vision quickly filled with tears.

The end

# THE PLAYHOUND CLUB

ELLIE DOUGLAS

# PLAYHOOD

# Hungry for Everything

The girls surged forward as one, shouting in a turbulent frenzy and pulling wildly at Angel's flesh. Her screams, tearing at her throat, were stifled by the many girls attacking her. She tried to fight back, but was overpowered. Her heart pounded against her chest, suffocating her, and all she could think was why? Why me? Why now? Why? Why? Why?

The group of girls bit, scratched, and pushed each other to get at Angel's body. They tore her skirt off and turned her over onto her stomach. They grabbed and bit at her exposed cheeks and legs. They ripped off chunks of her skin with their teeth and swallowed before returning for more. One of the girls, Rachel, pulled off Angel's sweater and bra, exposing her completely naked torso. Then Rachel, Megan, Tiffany, Sarah, and Tina tore off their own skirts, bras and panties. They were rubbing their own bodies and pushing anything inside of themselves that they could lay their hands on.

One of the taller girls leapt on top of Angel, slamming her body into her hard and forcing the others to the side. She tried to enter her as if she was a man, but she was dragged off of Angel by another and tossed to the ballroom floor. The others got back on Angel and buried their faces into her lifeless bloody body. They popped veins, stretched tendons, and pulled muscle and tissue as they savagely ate every bit of flesh they could find.

Three of the girls jumped on another girl, Rebecca, and pinned her to the ballroom floor, then another a petite girl, Tabatha, shoved her hands right inside of Rebecca's pussy as high as she could go. She pushed viciously at Rebecca's insides until she filled her tiny palm. She pulled out part of Rebecca's cervix. Tabatha went back in, forcing her hand deep inside of Rebecca. With a hard yank and twist, she pulled out more of Rebecca's cervix. She put it to her hungry mouth and devoured it. Going in a third time, her hand latched onto part of Rebecca's bladder. Tabatha poked a hole in the thin outer membrane before forcing a finger into the tougher bladder sack, rupturing it before bringing part of it out of Rebecca's pussy. Hot liquid ran out like a river, drenching Tabatha's hand and arm before pooling on the floor beneath Rebecca. Tabatha was unstoppable. She went in again, tearing Rebecca's pussy wide open. Claret rushed out and splattered across Tabatha's face and bare chest.

The other girls were tearing Angel apart. They had flipped her over so she now lay on her back. Several of the girls pulled Angel's legs wide apart into a split, though they did not stop there. They kept stretching until they heard the pop and knew her legs had just dislocated at the hips. They kept pulling Angel's legs wider and wider until they viciously detached from her torn-up body. The surges of aggression grew worse with each droplet of spilled blood. The girls feasted on Angel's flesh, carving her into sections and working their way through. They pulled out her spine and chewed on it like wolves going berserk on a cow.

Each of the girls in the ballroom were drenched in a mixture of their own blood and that of Angel and Rebecca. Their mouths were filled with one another's gore and one of them spat out one of Angel's teeth while another spat out parts of Angel's scalp covered in her long blonde hair. Still ravenous, they turned on each other and viciously pushed each other to the ground, desperate for flesh and brains. They slipped in the spilled blood and rolled around in it with wild, frantic moves. Grumbling, incoherent words spilled from their mouths. The girls offered themselves up for the festival of eating and fucking, rubbing themselves over each other, then biting the heads, arms, and legs off of the next closest girl. Each of them smiled sardonically and felt no pain. All they felt was the insatiable need to fuck and eat.

Rene Hefter had heard the commotion from his upstairs quarters, even though he was partially deaf. He made his way down the long, wide stairs to the second floor of the mansion and entered the enormous ballroom. On opening the door, he became instantly angry. All of his girls had gone crazy again. He pulled out a bright blue whistle that was hanging around his neck and blew into it hard. Suddenly, the girls snapped their heads toward the horrific sound. He saw that each one of them looked hungrier than the last time. Rene did not know how long he'd have before they were no longer able to be controlled. He blew the whistle over and over until they stopped eating each other.

Rene looked at all of his girls in horror. They were all completely naked and stood in the middle of the sanguine floor. Between them was his newest recruited girl, Angel. At least, what was left of her. Once he was assured that the girls had flipped their switches back off and were at a communicable level, he let them have it.

"Who's fucking idea was this then?"

“Don’t get your jocks twisted there, Hefter. We were only having some light fun.” Massie, the oldest girl, took the lead and spoke for everyone.

“Light fun. Are you insane? You killed my new girl. You almost killed each other. How many times have I told you girls to never, ever lose control? You were supposed to keep things handled better. I feed you enough brains, don’t I?

Massie looked at the girls. She could see they had lost three of them. The others stood there covered in so much blood that it was hard to tell they were naked. A crooked smile began forming; she pulled back her lips and stood sternly facing Rene.

“Well, we have been cooped up in this mansion for fifty years. You promised us immortality and great sex. You promised us that we’d never age and that there would be parties all the time. We got bored, man; so fucking bored. We needed some fun.” Massie had to force herself to calm down. She could feel her face flush, and her hands tightened into fists as her eyes changed from brown to bright white.

“What if I brought in some live brains for you to do with as you please? Once a month?”

“You said that before and never fulfilled your promises. So why should we believe you now?” Massie did everything to stop herself from changing. She didn’t want the whistle being blown again, and could see Rene holding it tightly against his smooth hairless chest.

“What would you suggest I do then, Massie?”

Massie looked at the other girls. As if she had telepathically spoken to them, they all nodded their heads in unison.

“We want out, once a week.”

“To do what? I give you the best of everything here.”

“Yes, that is true. We do have every*thing*, but we want to go *out*. We need to feel the sand between our toes. The warmth of the sun as it kisses our skin when we enter the ocean. The feel of people brushing by us as we shop for new clothing...”

“OK! I hear you. Get this room cleaned up. We have guests arriving for the ball tomorrow night. Guests that you are meant to entertain without eating. You think you girls can manage that? If you can do so without incident, I will let you out.”

“You better, Rene. We are pretty close to taking you over. I’m sure you don’t want that.” Massie sneered coldly. She stepped to within a foot of

Rene and intimidated him with her eyes, which had turned half-white before returning to their natural dark brown. Rene felt the hairs on his arms stand at full attention and he was very tempted to blow the whistle again. Instead, he backed up a foot and nodded before leaving the girls to clean up. He was scared. He felt like he was losing the battle of command. Soon he wouldn't be in charge. His business would suffer without the girls. He knew this and did everything he could to keep it going. Money and power drove him.

The thirty-five supermodel girls he had turned into zombie slaves to do as he desired had gone well for the past fifty years. Why did it have to change now? He thought about putting the girls down like rabid dogs and bringing a new bunch of girls in. His cock itched at the thought of new, young flesh sucking him off. He needed relief now. He turned back around and paced back into the ballroom.

"Lucy, you are up. Come suck my cock."

Lucy swaggered herself over to Rene. She pulled his pants down to his ankles and buried her head between his legs. The other girls stopped cleaning and hovered around. Some of them slid around on the blood stained floor, fingering themselves, while others engaged with one another, forming an orgy of intertwined bodies.

Lucy used her hands and stroked Rene's cock firmly, teasing it with her tongue before she stretched her luscious lips over the tip. She tipped her head back and dragged her lips off the tip of his hard rod and then tipped her head forward while pushing back on his dick. Her gaze turned into one of lust and her hazel eyes blinked up at his blue eyes while her hands masterfully stroked his member. Her tongue danced a rock tune over his cock and wrapped around his shaft like a snake.

He felt her jaw widening to take him all the way to the back of her throat. With each thrusting and pulling she used her hands to grab his balls. She squeezed firmly on them while rotating them between her fingers. She picked up speed and tightened her mouth around his shaft. Forming an o-shape with her lips, she pulled his cock into her mouth like she was sucking through a straw. He could feel his balls filling, and the urge to explode washed over him.

Lucy leaned her head backwards ever so slightly and he could feel his manhood being suckled deeper and deeper down her throat. Her teeth grazed the tip of his dick while her nails dug into his balls before she

grabbed them firmly and squeezed. Rene moaned loudly and shot his load down the back of her throat. She didn't let go. Her mouth tightened even more around the head of his cock and she sucked harder until every last drop was drained from his member. She released the grip she had on his balls and slid her fingers across his thighs, up to his groin, and gently scratched across his stomach.

Rene looked down and was momentarily horrified with the sight of blood covering his now deflating cock. It took him a moment to realize it wasn't his blood, but that which was on Lucy. She was covered in plasma head to toe. He had completely overlooked her appearance with his urgency to be sucked off. Disgusted with the sight of it, he pushed her away. Lucy gave a confused look before stepping aside and skipping off to join the orgy in the middle of the room.

Rene looked at the girls briefly before a sickly feeling rose into the back of his throat. All of the girls were fingering and sucking one another with the three dead girls sprawled underneath them. He rushed out of the room yelling at them.

"Clean the fucking room and get rid of the bodies."

He almost tripped, having not done his pants up properly. As he was rushing out of the ballroom his pants slid back down to his ankles. He angrily pulled them up and headed straight for the shower. After his shower he sat on his super-king-sized four-poster bed and wondered what he'd done and how stupid he was with everything.

He started to believe that his time was up. If only he'd not been a greedy sonofabitch, he'd have had a normal life rather than be faced with his prison. He sighed again and again. His breathing was deep and hard. He hated the idea of his immortality being a façade, and he couldn't help but wonder what the devil had in store for him. He lay back hard and nestled his head into the pillows. He closed his eyes, allowing the flood gates of memory to open wide.

His reminiscing engulfed him. He remembered how happy he was when his father was alive, and how sad and dead he felt when the only good thing was taken from him. His father was returning on foot with groceries when he was mugged, stabbed, and left to die. No one found Rene's father, Jake Hefter, and so he had bled to death. Without a mother, who had died giving birth to Rene, and now without a father at the age of sixteen. Taken into foster care five times before settling in with a Christian family.

The Riddles converted him and moulded him into a man. He had a good job after being a high school drop-out. At seventeen he worked for his foster father's accountant firm. Rene had fond memories of numeracy; he was good at it, and he only got better. He enjoyed the high income and the challenges. His memory leapt over a few years, focusing on the day he met Anna Sprite at church. He remembered celebrating his twenty-first birthday and inviting her. She was one year older, and she'd not been at the Riddles' church before then. She was a newcomer, one Rene was smitten with.

His mind leapt forward two more years to when he was on one knee proposing to Anna in front of the entire congregation at the Riddles' Baptist church. She had said yes, he had shaken off the demons of emptiness, and was finally happy again. Rene stirred on his bed, shook and moaned with the memory of Anna leaving him. He vividly remembered returning home from work to see the house empty. Not only of her, but of every bit furniture, every CD, every DVD, and even the whiteware; nothing was left, it was all gone. Rene stirred some more and shifted onto his side at the memory of him arguing with the landlord over the back payment of rent due. He had nothing, Anna had cleared out their joint account and left him with fifty cents. Rene saw himself falling into a dark depression. He tried taking his life and failed. He was kicked out of his rented home, lost his job, and lost his foster parents all in the same week.

Rene saw himself on the streets begging for food and money and shivering in the cold and cursing God. He blamed God for just over a year. Then he remembered praying to the devil and promising the devil that he'd do anything if he could be heard, answered, and given a chance. Nothing happened for a few months. He was about to give up. Then, with one final begging prayer to the devil, he remembered saying out loud, "Devil, you can have my soul. just get me out of here.

When nothing happened, Rene was set on ending his life for good this time. He sat in a pile of emptied trash bags and planned out his death. That morning he woke to a bitter, freezing cold. He could feel his body breaking down with hypothermia. Instead of pulling the trash bags around himself for warmth or standing with the other homeless men around a barrel of fire, he kicked the trash bags away from himself. He tore off his ragged shirt and pulled down his stained, ripped jeans. H kicked off his holey shoes and sat in his underpants in the freezing cold. Whenever one of the other homeless offered a hand to him, he'd shove it away angrily.

Rene remembered how he was about to punch the next homeless man that reached a hand out, when suddenly his eyes caught the bright red nail polish of an exquisitely manicured hand. He lifted his sorrowful eyes to meet those of the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen. He felt his face heat up with embarrassment and found his arms reaching for the trash bags. The woman watched him for a long while. Then she spoke. When she did, it sounded like an angelic harp to him.

"Hello Rene, my name is Jessie Lipton, and I'm here to give you everything you desire."

Rene remembered being confused and doubtful. He looked Jessie up and down. She had the deepest, darkest brown eyes, almost more black than brown. Her body reminded him of an Amazonian princess. She wore a leather miniskirt with a tight fitting leather tank top. It was her boobs that he fixated on, then her legs, then her lips: those full, luscious, rosy lips.

Rene stirred on top of his bed as the memory of Jessie flooded him. He could see her as clearly as if she was standing there with him now. Her long brunette hair carried red flecks like glowing gems. Everything about her was perfect. He'd never seen a woman like her, yet he still doubted her words.

"I am the devil's witch, Rene. Tell me what it is that you want and it will be granted."

Again Rene was very doubtful. He looked past her at the other homeless men, but they didn't seem to see her. If they had they would all be looking, but instead they were drinking their booze and warming the chills out of their frail bones. Rene cast his eyes back on the wonderment in front of him and believed he'd lost it. Things like this didn't happen in the real world, so he convinced himself that it was all some kind of dream. To prove himself right, he decided to make ridiculous wishes.

"All right then, let's see how real you are." With that he rattled off his crazy wishes. First he wished to be outlandishly handsome, buffed, and well-toned. He wished to be filthy rich and to be living in a mansion. Then he wished that he was immortal. Then, just to throw sand in the face of this angel, he wished he was surrounded by women slaves that were all sexy supermodels, but zombies that he could control. Rene remembered laughing in the face of that beautiful woman who called herself Jessie. He remembered the cold rush that swam through his veins and how suddenly tired he felt. Rene clearly remembered closing his eyes and confirming that

she was indeed just a vision of his imagination. It wasn't until he woke up in a super-king-sized four-poster bed that he realized she was real. Rene also remembered very clearly the confusion mixed with excitement at how Jessie reappeared right out of thin air.

"Rene Hefter, everything you have wanted has been granted. I'm here to collect payment."

"Payment? How on earth can I pay someone like you? You can obviously conjure up any amount of wealth you so please."

"It is not money my king desires, but the payment of your soul."

"But if I give you my soul, how will I think or function without it?"

"You do not need your soul for all those things. Your brain will maintain the same."

"And I'm definitely immortal and I'll stay twenty-seven for the rest of eternity?"

"Yes. Now removing your soul may hurt a little." Jessie licked her lips, placed both hands over Rene's head, and chanted in some unknown language. The pain was intense. It felt like a thousand headaches rushed at him all at the same time. He had an all-consuming feeling of nausea, and then in a matter of seconds it was all gone. He felt no different after that.

"Rene, there are rules you must follow. If you do not follow them my king will collect."

"Collect what?"

"The rest of you. All of you. You!"

"Oh. So what are the rules then?"

"You wished for supermodel zombie slave girls that you can control. Take this." Jessie handed him a small blue whistle with a gold chain attached. "You will wear this at all times. If one of the girls touches the whistle they will instantly turn to ash." Jessie paused while she put the gold chain around his neck. The whistle sat firmly over his breastbone. "If the girls get out of control, you will blow the whistle once. It will bring them back under your control. If you have to use this over a long period of time it will grow weaker. So use it wisely. If you allow any of the thirty-five girls to leave the premises my king will collect you."

"Are there any more rules?"

"No," she said, and with that she vanished. Rene saw himself looking around his new room, exploring it before he stepped out of the bedroom and explored the mansion. He had a cook, a cleaner, and a butler. The mansion

was huge, with thirty-eight bedrooms in total. It had eighteen bathrooms, one gymnasium, a ballroom the size of an average house, a movie theatre room, a library, an indoor heated swimming pool, an outdoor pool shaped as a guitar, a formal dining room, four lounges, and all the trimmings and furniture he could have only dreamed of owning.

Rene shifted and grew excited at the memory of seeing how much money he had in his new bank account. It was 2028 and he saw himself opening his brand new IPhone18G and following the app to his bank, logging in, and eyeballing the figures. Two-hundred million dollars. A text came in, and he read it. “Mr Hefter, should you require more money just say ‘dollars’ out loud.” End of text. His fondest memory was meeting the thirty-five young supermodels. They were waiting for him in the gallery room which he’d overlooked the first time he explored the mansion.

The young ladies sat in a circle and each stood one by one to introduce herself to him. Over the years they grew smart and wanted things that Rene wasn’t permitted to give. As he lay on his bed stirring with his memoires he felt the presence of eyes watching him. He slowly opened his eyes and saw Liz naked at the foot of his bed.

# The Girls Want to Play

“Liz, why are you here?” Rene moved a little as his cock began to grow.

“I want to play with you. Your body is so delicious that I can’t stop thinking about how sexy you are.”

“Really now? Do tell me how sexy I am while I lick those delicious nipples of yours.”

Liz moved like a panther, her body agile, fast, and strong,. Her skin was milky white, she had striking green eyes that appeared to glow, reminding Rene of a wild cats’ eyes gleaming brightly.

She slipped her body next to Rene forming an s-shape. Rene leaned over slightly, running one hand up her side and causing her to shiver. That same hand found her breast and he cupped it gently while his thumb played lightly across her hardened nipple. Liz arched her back and softly moaned.

“Tell me,” Rene ordered, pinching her nipple a little firmer.

“You have the sexiest chiselled abs I have ever seen. I love how when you are wearing your shirts and you flex your biceps, I can see through your shirt how muscular you are. It leaves me breathless.” Liz paused to moan and arch her body into his hands. She wanted to feel his tongue wrap around her nipples.

“Keep going,” Rene demanded.

“You have the face of an actor, bright blue eyes, the perfect shaped nose and lips so kissable that it sends waves of electricity through me. I love to run my fingers through your thick head of dark hair and see how your body reacts to my touch. I love running my nails down your chiseled chest to your taut flat stomach to your huge erect cock. Smooth as silk is the only way to describe how your skin feels to the touch.” Liz let out a loud moan and twisted her body harder into his, desperate for his mouth, for more of his touch.

“Come on, Liz, you can do better than that. Tell me how sexy I am.”

“Not only are your physical assets dreamy, but your voice carries a siren’s tune, sweet and yet deep at the same time. You lure me in with your voice, you penetrate me with your deep ocean eyes. I could swim in them all day and all night.”

Rene lowered his mouth and lightly blew air across Liz’s nipple while his hand fondled her other breast softly, tweaking that nub between his

thumb and forefinger. Liz moaned loudly. Her breathing had become so ragged that it was hard for her to speak. Rene blew another hot breath of air across her areola and then lowered his mouth, feeding her breast inside. All she could feel was the heat as all of her senses exploded. Panting and pushing her body into his mouth, her hands roamed across his Zeus-like body until she reached his hot bulging cock. Her hands gripped around the shaft, and with the suckling of her tit, she'd squeeze his cock harder. She stroked him faster and twirled her fingertip across the top of his cock before running her nails down his shaft to his balls, where she would hover lightly then squeeze firmly.

Rene pulled his lips from Liz's ample breast, swung her flat on her back, and then slid his body on top, giving her body gentle kisses along the way. Liz's body filled with tingles and her pussy grew wetter. Rene hovered over her belly button, gently licking her toned stomach and popping his tongue in and out of her little dimple. Liz arched her back raising her pelvis toward his mouth, forcing him to go lower, crying out for him to go lower, begging him with labored breathing to do it. Rene slithered down some more and brushed his face against her trimmed pussy. It was slick with wetness, even wetter than when they had done it earlier.

Rene pushed his tongue firmly into the head of her clit and Liz let out a deep scream while thrusting her body firmer against his tongue.

"Oh God! Eat me," Liz begged.

Rene didn't answer her. His hands roamed up the sides of her and across to her breasts. He squeezed them firmly before tweaking her nipples between thumb and forefinger, while his tongue began a lap dance Liz would never forget. She moaned out louder still, screaming in ecstasy. Her hands grabbed at his, joining them in the fondling of her tits. She pushed his hands down harder, forcing him to be rougher. Her body wriggled and squirmed beneath him, and arched up and down onto his mouth forcing his tongue to paint her pussy with lavish strokes. She panted and waited for him to dip his tongue inside of her, spreading her legs wider. Rene read the signals well, and after a little more teasing he slid his tongue inside of her. His tongue circled her inside, swishing around, and his lips closed over her pussy lips. He suckled slowly at first, but then his momentum picked up with each thrust of her body against his mouth.

Rene's tongue poked deeply inside of Liz's pussy. Her wetness saturated his face while his lips drew everything in and lapped her up like a hungry

animal. Suddenly he felt hands on his ass. He lifted his head and Liz cried out. Looking over his shoulder he saw Tiffany and Amber. He gave them a wink and bowed his head into Liz's bucking body, and then shoved his tongue in harder than before. He grabbed her hips tightly as he ate her out. He could feel the girls behind him. One grabbed at his fast filling nuts, the other rubbed her breasts across his lower back and ass. He squirmed and reared his back up to meet Tiffany's large triple D's. Amber sucked harder on his balls and her hands roamed underneath, pulling at his cock.

Rene stopped arching upwards and brought his body down. He stopped licking out Liz and lifted himself up higher, placing his cock directly in line with Liz's dripping wet pussy. He lowered himself in, thrusting deeply while Amber squeezed his balls. With Amber's hands gripped around his nuts, Tiffany's tits rubbing against his back and ass, and Liz's dripping went cunt, he was in heaven. With all his earlier concerns melting away from his mind, he exploded in one of his biggest orgasms yet. He pushed himself off and fell to the left of Liz. Immediately, Tiffany got on top of Liz, rushing her tongue in frenzied movements across her tits, down her stomach, and into her saturated pussy. Tiffany eagerly licked up Liz's juices along with Rene's sperm. Amber lay next to Rene and stared at him. Her emerald green gaze penetrated into his deep blue eyes.

Rene looked away from Amber and cast his eyes on her body, then onto the other two. He was floored by how perfect each of them were, yet how different. He just lay there admiring them while they screwed each other. He often did that until he wanted more. They were always at his beck and call, no matter the time.

# Trouble Brews

Rene had just stepped out of the shower when he heard shouting. He quickly put on his cashmere robe and followed the noise. It led him into the movie theatre room. All of his girls were naked and most of them were seated on the extra-large Lazy Boys with their feet extended. The lights were dim and a movie had been paused on the one hundred inch screen. It was Massie that caught his eye. She was throwing punches at one of his girls that had her back turned, and Rene didn't know who it was. He walked down the sloping ramp toward the stage, climbed the three black steps, and rushed over to stop Massie.

"If you don't stop I will blow this damn whistle," he yelled over the noise of her shouting at the girl on the ground.

Massie turned sharply and glared coldly at Rene. She threw one more punch, hitting the girl square in the middle of her shoulder blades. Then Massie swiftly kicked the girl and stormed off, taking a seat in the front row. Rene shook his head in disbelief. He leaned down and helped the girl up. He was shocked to see it was one of his favorite girls, Pip. She had a bloody mouth and her hair had been torn from her scalp on one side. Bruises had started to purple and swell across her cheek and collar bone.

"What the hell, Massie?"

"She started it."

"Did not," Pip said in a meek voice that cracked so dryly that Rene thought she was going to choke.

"Linda, get Pip some water now!"

Linda got up and rolled her eyes, strolled over to the cooler, and filled a plastic cup. She went straight to Pip, handed it to her, and then took her seat again.

"Jesus, Massie, I swear something has gotten you all turned around. Why, I think it might be time you left."

"Left? Yes, that is exactly what I want. So do a lot of the other girls. Right girls?" Massie turned in her seat to stare at the others. None of them were brave enough to agree with her, and it angered her more. She jumped out of her seat and walked straight up to Rene.

"I want out. Those other scaredy-cat's do as well, but stuff them. Just let me go, Rene."

"I will. But in order for you to leave you must first touch this whistle. It is the only way to free yourself." Rene remained calm. He'd had it up to his

eyeballs with Massie. She was nothing but trouble and he didn't want the devil returning and taking everything away, so he played it very cool.

"Are you sure that is the only way? I am scared of that whistle. We all are!"

"I know, but the devil told me the only way to free you – any of you – was for the whistle to be touched. So if you want out, this the only way."

Massie crossed her arms over her naked breasts. Her legs shook and her eyes glanced around the dimmed room. A few of the others nodded for her to do it. The rest just sat there, unsure of what to do or say.

"Well, Massie? I haven't got all day. Either you want out or you don't."

"I do."

"Then hurry it up. I want to get Pip seen to. You've done a fine job of beating her up, and you still didn't tell me what it was about."

"She wanted to watch a horror and I wanted to watch a romance. End of story." Massie said, unfolding her arms and reaching for the whistle necklace around Rene's neck. Rene stayed perfectly still, counting in his head, waiting for that moment she touched it. At the last second, she withdrew her hand and grabbed Pip's hand, forcing it to touch the whistle. Everyone in the room gasped loudly when Pip's body burst into particles of dust and suddenly vanished.

"You fucking lied to me."

"No, Massie, I didn't. Pip, who you know was my favorite out of you all, is now free. Probably in some penthouse in the city getting ready to go out. That is how it works. You vanish, and poof you are gone."

"Stop the bullshitting. We all witnessed her turning to ash. I saw her body blast into millions of tiny particles and then swoosh around in circles before vanishing. So stop your fucking bullshitting. We are truly stuck here for all eternity, aren't we?" Massie asked. Through her aggression she couldn't stop the change from human to zombie. Her face filled with rage and red veins spread across her like a spider web. Her eyes turned white and her mouth pulled into a snarl. Rene backed up a few feet, but it was too late. She grabbed at him, touching the whistle accidentally. Yet she did not turn into dust. Only in human form would they die. She ripped into Rene like Godzilla tearing buildings apart, and his blood shot into the air in thick theatrical arches that spread across the deep red velvet curtains behind him.

Massie split open Rene's head, pushed her hand right through his skull and pulled out his brain. She brought it to her hungry mouth and feasted on it. The smell of his brains and blood ignited the room. The other woman turned into zombie form and rushed the stage for their share of his flesh. The women felt different after eating Rene. He'd been fileted of all his flesh, and all that

remained were his bones. Aggression spilled into the blood of the women, and they turned on themselves.

Tiffany grabbed Amber by her hair and swung her onto the ground so hard that she almost lost consciousness. Amber bit into Tiffany's side, tearing a chunk of her thigh muscle off. Tiffany howled in a rage. Neither of them felt pain. Tiffany kicked Amber so hard that Amber went flying off the tiny stage and landed hard onto the wooden floor. She jumped to her feet, and as she went to climb back on the stage Tiffany kicked her so solidly in the face that she knocked out several of Amber's teeth.

Julie, Tina, and Olive pulled two of the Lazy Boy chairs up, breaking them into bits and wielding the steel arms as weapons. All of the girls in the room screamed in a wild fury, stomping on the limbs of others, pulling the hair from one another, biting and eating each other. Each girl slipped on at the steadily growing pool of blood, making it harder to stay standing. A crazy burst of laughter echoed through the room, causing a momentary pause before the girls viciously continued attacking one another. Jill had her arms ripped off, Jordan was split wide open and her tits chewed right off, while Sue bit the tongue off another girl. The girls all bore the same animalistic look of utter madness on their faces. Their eyes were white and wide, and their mouths were filled with gore and fell slack with excessive drooling.

The front of the movie theatre room now resembled a grisly war zone with body parts and a river of blood. The girls that remained alive charged at each other with open mouths and clenched fists. Karen bit Massie's fingers off as she raised her arms to protect her head from the steel bar that Suzy was now wielding, smashing everything in her path. Karen had snuck up underneath Massie and took her left hand, pulling it to her mouth and biting down hard. She went in for the arm next but Massie swung around and slammed a knee into Karen's face. Karen went down and Suzy dropped the steel bar and consumed Karen. She ate her face off, first ripping her nose off in a single bite, then pulling her eyes out and pooping them into her mouth one at a time. She swallowed them whole. Plasma had sprayed across the one hundred inch screen in jagged arches.

Massie screamed and howled in a fierce rage, charging at Trina like a rabid dog. Trina tumbled forward as she slipped on the sanguine fluid. As soon as she was down, Massie leapt on top of her and ripped open her stomach, pushing her right hand deep inside and pulling out Trina's guts before bringing them to her hungry mouth. Her left hand was useless with no fingers, but it didn't stop her. Murky liquid dribbled from one of Trina's intestines as Massie bit into it. She lapped it up wildly and went in for more.

From the top of the movie theatre a loud clapping startled the remaining four women. They looked up aggressively and then titled their heads to the side like lost animals. The devil himself sat there watching the show before him. He applauded like a lunatic, wearing the grin of a malicious beast.

"Well done puppets. Now let's see which of you four lives."

"We have done your bidding for fifty damn years. Why not let us go? We didn't ask for any of this," Massie managed to say between her transformation back to human.

"Because of Rene's selfish desires, I created you. So blame him, not me. You will do as I demand, or burn in hell forever. The choice is yours!"

"So the one who survives gets to live a normal life? To be a real human?"

"If that is your desire, then yes. Snap to it, I have places to be." He grinned mischievously, showing his shark-like teeth. Massie noted the horns growing out of his head and chuffed to herself. She quickly turned back into zombie mode and ploughed into the three other ladies, ripping into them like a piranha. They had no chance in hell of surviving her brutality. It was over before it had even started. The show was non-pleasing to the devil. He rose out of his seat and flew to the stage. Without a single word he blew a kiss to Massie, and she burst into flames.

In the blink of an eye, the mansion and all of its contents vanished.

*Moral of this story....The devil always collects on a contract. Nothing lasts forever! Don't bet on the house...or the clothes...or the money.*

The end

# FOOTHILL REST HOME

ELLIE DOUGLAS

# FOOTHILL REST HOME

***This is my journal and should you be reading this, well... it will mean I've died. Now this is going to be shocking and unbelievable, but it needs to be read so you can inform others and build a better world.***

# Journal Entry - Day 1

At 82 years of age my arthritic hands make writing harder for me each and every day. So, I've asked my lovely nurse, Angela, to write my journal entries for me. This is why you are now seeing a change in my writing. Don't worry. I haven't died yet.

So, today I got to see my grandson Jacob. He just turned three and let me tell you that he is the cutest boy ever. He has the chubbiest cheeks with a very slender frame. Yes, he looks odd and awkward with a big head, chubby cheeks and a tiny slim body, but I'm sure he'll grow into his head. Right?

He brought some cookies for me. Little did he know I can't eat them now, not since my teeth fell out and my dentures don't bite hard enough to chew on hard cookies. His mum, my daughter, means well but she can't bake worth shit. They stayed for a good hour, tiring me out. I didn't have the heart to tell them. When they were gone I placed my balding head on my soft feather pillow, and nurse Angela covered me the way I like – with extra thick blankets – and I slept for about five hours.

# Journal Entry - Day 2

Come, sit with me and enjoy a cup of coffee. Don't worry. My flirting days are over. Once upon a time I was a handsome man; now look at me. All wrinkled up like a screwed up bit of paper. I was once 5'11 with a slender frame. The girls used to swoon over me. I would hear them say things about me like, 'he has the heart of a lion.' Or, 'look at him playing tennis like a pro.' It helped that I was slim and muscular, and I did hear several compare me to a 'brown-skinned Adonis.' Personally, I think it was my eyes. It used to be that their legs would grow wobbly and their panties would get wet when they looked into my eyes. I used to love those days when women flirted with me. Even though I was happily married to Chloe, it was nice to be adored by others.

Now, Chloe was a doll. Her skin was pale and as smooth and silky as a rose petal. She had the biggest light-hazel eyes you ever saw. Sometimes I remember how her eyes seemed to grow bigger when she was upset or sick. Her personality was her best feature. She could stop a crowd of people with just her beautiful smile. I do miss her. The saddest day of my life was when she passed at the early age of 75. Damn heart gave out and just stopped. I can't talk anymore. I'll see you again tomorrow.

# Journal Entry - Day 3

I had a bad night. My arthritis kept me up in pain for most of my night. I hope you had a better night than I did. Something else is going on. I noticed it here at the rest home. I can’t put my finger on it just yet, but something sinister is happening.

# Journal Entry - Day 4

Well, it has been a few hours since the last entry and now it's a new day. Do you remember how I was telling you about something happening here at the rest home? Well if you believe in monsters, you'll believe what I'm about to tell you. And sonny, if you don't believe me, then you best fuck off because you'll die anyways.

Yesterday I witnessed Candice, a 79-year-old crabby bitch of a woman, bite Nurse Julie. But it didn't just stop there. No, it got much worse. I stood in the dayroom about ready to play cards with Jack when all hell broke loose. Candice not only bit Nurse Julie but she didn't stop biting her. She was fucking eating her. Yes. I swear it on the Bible. She ate her arm and then bit into her neck. Blood from Julie sprouted out like a goddamn fire hose, shooting all over Candice and the floor. I backed out of the room when Candice was thrown to the floor by the security guard, Jimmy Sparks. I heard her bones snap. I swear I will forever hear that turkey bone snapping, leg crunching, bone cracking sound. Damn it...more commotion. I have to go.

# Journal Entry - Day 10

Yes, I had to skip six days. During those six days we lost a lot of people, including the security guard, Jimmy, and the other security guard, David Horizon. Both of them were attacked by a nurse and three rest home residents. Ripped right to shreds they were. It was like watching them enter a massive tree mulching machine. Skin, bone, hair and nails just splattered about the day room. A fight broke out between Gretchen and Judy – two other residents here. I think they were 68 and 72 respectively; dunno, it don't matter much. The point is this fight broke out between them. They ate each other right before my fucking eyes.

First it started with Judy. She pushed her table away and then stood up aggressively. She moaned and snapped her head sideways like Frankenstein. Her entire face changed before me. First it was her usual skin color: white as snow. Then it pinked up before turning a gray colour. Yep, fucking gray. Then her veins rose to the surface of her flesh. They looked like squiggly lines, as if they had been drawn on by some toddler.

The thing is, all of her bones started to crumble at first. Then they snapped back into what can only be described as a young teenager's body. She was all straight up tall and no longer bent forward and arched. Even her skin grew taut and looked supple before it sagged drastically and looked like drooping fried eggs.

Her eyes changed from blue to white globs of nothingness. Her mouth pulled back into a vicious snarl and she reached madly for Gretchen. When Judy bit down on Gretchen's neck, nothing happened; no blood, no cuts, nothing. It was then that I saw Judy had no teeth. She was trying to gum Gretchen to death. She kept on biting and gaining nothing in her gummy mouth. She drooled excessively as she pinched and pulled Gretchen to her mouth repeatedly.

Then Gretchen started to transform. She was a pretty old woman to start with. Then she turned into a hideous beast. Her eyes also turned into globs of white looking goo. She still had a mouth full of teeth, and when she bit down on Judy, blood rushed from Judy's open throat to the floor. Gretchen went back for more, ripping Judy's throat out entirely. But fucking hell, she didn't stop there. Nope. She kept on going right up Judy's face. It was when she sucked out Judy's eye and swallowed it like a fucking oyster that Nurse

Angela grabbed me and dragged me to my room. She kept me safe. I admit I was scared. *Hell,* I didn't want to be eaten. Angela didn't either. She was crying for her child. She wanted to go home but couldn't. You see, the outside world as we once knew it was gone to those things.

Where did they come from? We don't know. How did it start? We don't know that either. I suspect some kind of virus, since some were transforming without even having been bitten. I keep thinking about my own grown children, my grandbabies, and well, the entire world. I'm 82 years old, so I had my chance to live. But those babies, and the young, they haven't. This world is a cruel place. I'm very tired now, but how can one sleep with that going on? Lucky for me my room has a lock. Once those things had changed from human into walking cannibals, they seemed to be abso-fucking-lutely dumb as fuck as far as how to open and unlock a doors. They can't. So Angela and I are safe. For now. We need to get out, but where do we go? Angela's going to work on a plan while I take a nap.

# Journal Entry - Day 15

We are running out of food. The residents of Foothill Rest home have all turned into those walking cannibals; the staff too. I feel doomed. Angela feels it too. Her plan to get us out failed. I'm too old to run, especially with my arthritis, and I've not had any pain medication or arthritic meds for some days now. You can imagine how much pain I'm in.

I need to write this – OK I need Angela to write this, but I had to give her a moment. She was crying. I want her to be safe, Lord knows I do. She's been looking after me this whole time. We are the only living humans left in this rest home. OK, she's back again. I'll let her carry on for me.

The place started to stink up. All Angela and I could smell was dead, putrid meat. It permeated into my nose and left a bitter taste in the back of my throat. Angela said it was the same for her. For a few days we could hear deathly atrocious hollering from outside. My little barred window offered very little in the way of seeing what was happening outside. Even if it could I was only looking directly into one of Foothill's gardens. My heart ached, but I knew what had to be done.

I thought I had convinced Angela to give me the last of the morphine and to use my body as a shield. She was young, only twenty-fours old, and had a daughter somewhere out there. She had to go find her child.

Angela was kind and tried to convince me that there was another way, that someone would rescue us. I knew it wasn't ever going to happen. It was time I got her out, so she could find her family.

# Journal Entry - Day 18

I'm still here. I was unable to convince Angela to save herself. Besides, the morphine was kept in a locked glass cabinet in the nurse's area, and neither of us could make it there. We stayed in my room for a few more days. The power was out and it was getting colder. We were both hungry. Food had run out and all we had left was four bottles of water. While she slept I left the room. Though this is hard for me to write, I need to tell you what I saw.

Once I quietly stepped out of my haven and entered the hallway, I almost fell over due to the revolting stench. A few days back it was ripe; now it was ten times worse. Bile rose to the back of my throat, coating it in hot acid. I wanted to be sick but forced myself to stay still and quiet. I could hear them. They scared the shit out of me. Lord fucking knows it wouldn't take much to overpower me.

I tiptoed awkwardly toward the dayroom. It was the only way to the kitchen. When my eyes caught movement I would stop and hold my breath. Except my breathing was like fucking daytime snoring. Damn old age, it fucks everything up. I kept pausing. Kept moving. Kept holding my breath. I managed to get through to the dayroom and what I saw will be tattooed into my damn brain forever. Even in death I believe I will see this.

Several of the freaky looking cannibals were lumbering around by the TV. On the floor beneath them lay several mutilated bodies. Some were still alive, but had transformed and were twitching, or reaching torn up arms outward as if to grab onto something. The amount of limbs scattered around the dayroom was astronomical. The blue carpet was no longer blue. It was stained blood red.

The innards of old folks and staff members were spilled across multiple sections, and plasma had painted the crappy white walls into a spectacular form of art. If one had not known it was blood, one would have appreciated the creative artwork from arterial spray to body parts. OK, as morbid as that is, it was a glorious sight, even if it stung my insides like a hundred bees. My stomach churned and the hunger I had felt was gone. Now all I wanted was a way out for Angela.

I looked toward the exit, through the dayroom on the left was the way out. On the right were the administration offices and further down that corridor was where the nurse's station and kitchen were. I couldn't see what

was lurking behind that wall. It was the only way out. If you haven't already noticed, I repeat myself. Hey man, give me a break. I am old, remember? Eighty-two fucking years old. I made my way there. Being extra quiet and stepping over body parts was the hardest job I have had in my entire life. My knees were threatening to give out on me, and the constant lifting of my legs to step over the remains was killing me. But I kept on going, my thoughts on Angela. I must save her. I made it to the wall and held it to catch my ragged breath. Jesus, I sounded like a distant freight train and couldn't believe that none of the cannibals heard me. It could have been just me hearing myself and assuming I was louder than I actually was.

I looked at my hand on the wall and braced the scream rising in my throat. At first I thought it was just damp from the lack of air. But hell no. It was worse than being just a damp fucking wall. My hand was resting on what looked like the remains of a fucking eyeball. I quickly dropped my hand and wiped it across my pajama pants. I took one step forward, then another, until I could stretch my head around the corner of the wall to see what was behind it.

I craned my head, arched it as far forward as I could, and looked left and right. The reception area was clear except for one old man named George. He looked right at me. I pulled my head in quickly and held my breath. After a few seconds I looked back around and he was still staring right at me. The hairs on my arms and neck stabbed at me. I was shitting my pants.

I knew, for the first time, that they couldn't see. Whatever happened to their eyes during transforming disabled their vision. But then what were they using to find people and attack them? It must be sound, so I decided to test my theory. I retreated back quietly into the dayroom. I caught sight of an upturned book on the floor and bent over and picked it up. Damn, doing that nearly killed my back. I had to stop and stretch upwards to correct the lower back pain. It did little to help.

I crept back to the corner of the wall, poked my head around again, and still George was glaring my way. Jesus he had turned into one ugly fubar. His skin had opened up in places, and some kind of brownish liquid was oozing out. His face had changed too. His nose was gone. Yep, I kid you not, he had no fucking nose. Just two gaping black holes right smack bang in the middle of his face. His veins were bright and reddish purple that

spread across his entire body. His pajama top was torn half from his torso while his pants were split on one side where he was obviously bitten.

I edged forward a little more and threw the book to the right, which headed towards the offices. Immediately George's head snapped toward the sound, and from behind me the others had heard it too. They were all now moving toward the noise. I panicked and let out a damn scream. They heard that too. I quickly picked up a severed hand. Holding down the rising vomit, I threw it across the room. Again they headed toward that. I used the wall to guide myself back towards my own room. I was – or at least I thought I was – being very quiet. Except I wasn't. I was standing on debris and unknown body parts. My bare feet were making squelching sounds and I had to stop moving. In front of me on the stained carpet was Bob Mangrove's hat. It was one of those cowboy ones made from tough leather, so I knew it would make some good noise. I again lowered my body and picked it up. My right knee cracked when I stood back upright, and I froze when two of them followed the sound of my cracking knee.

I threw the hat as far as I could, and damn it, fucking thing caught the end of one of the couches and landed five feet from me. I had no choice but to move back towards the exit. I pressed my body hard against the wall and used it to brace my walking. I slid slowly back along the wall until I was back watching George. He had moved a few feet and I could hear his breathing, if you could call it that. It was a grunting more than a breathing. I will admit that it freaked me out seeing him up close. I couldn't believe how deformed he looked. It reminded me of one of those creatures from the movie *The Hills Have Eyes*.

I waited for a few minutes. When the others in the dayroom ambled back towards the telly, I took the chance to make my way back to my room. But fucking damn it, it was just my luck that I stood on an ear and yes, I screamed again. This time only one of the things seemed to home in on me. It charged at me at an alarming rate. I automatically closed my eyes and threw my hands up in defense and it chomped right on my wrist. I opened my eyes when I felt no pain. I couldn't help myself, I laughed like a kid going on a roller coaster ride for the first time. I'm talking downright hard-out laugh your guts out. Here was Newton furiously biting at my wrist and clawing at me with his hands but not penetrating my skin because like most in here he had no fucking teeth. His dentures must have fallen out, and the sorry bastard was trying to gum me to death.

My laughing was a stupid mistake. From the corner of my left eye I could sense someone coming up behind me. From in front of me the others that were biting at the air now charged at me too. I may be 82 years old, but I am not going to do go down without a fight. I pulled my arm away from Newton and pushed him into the oncoming hoard of biters. I tried to run, but my age limited me there. However, I was successful at moving faster than they were.

They all shot their heads in various ways looking without looking. I tell you, it was the scariest moment of my life to see them standing still listening for me. Jesus Christ, what kind of world creates such monsters? That was what had gone through my mind. When they couldn't find me, my breathing relaxed a bit. I had got about five feet away when I spied an upturned stainless steel food tray. I picked that up and hurled it across the room. It smacked against the wall with a heavy thump.

Brainless like a blade of grass, those dumb shits motioned toward the noise. I then picked up another discarded book. The damn thing was splattered in someone's blood. I cringed and screwed up my face, but had to do what was necessary. I chucked it hard at the same wall and those cannibals all fell for the noise diversion.

It gave me the chance I needed. I hightailed it back to my room. Once inside I shut the door quietly and locked it. I woke Angela up and told her about my discoveries. She was thrilled. It meant we now had a chance to escape.

# Journal Entry - Day 19

After my ordeal, I was pretty exhausted. OK, I was more than exhausted. As you know from my last entry, I had made it back to my room and after waking Angela I had to lie down. That turned into almost seven full hours of sleep. During that time, Angela had been gathering things around my room. I had a collection of snow globes. She'd found a shoe box with my funeral shoes. Yes, funeral shoes. Come on, you can't tell me you didn't plan your funeral attire? Well, even if you haven't or never thought to, let me tell you I did. Not only do I have my funeral shoes but my suit as well. It's hanging up nicely in the closet in a drycleaners bag. OK, come on. We got off track here.

So Angela gets a collection of all my globes, and though I will be sad to see them used in such a damaging way, I know they are going to be our only way out. Angela is sleeping and my arthritis is killing my hand, but someone has to write this. So bear with me while I write. It might be somewhat messy and unreadable, but I'm sure you will manage.

I changed into a pair of sweat pants and matching sweat top. Oh come on, when you get to my age you don't want to be restricted with tight jeans, especially when you have to pee every hour. I put on my walkers and sat on my desk chair. I waited. Watching Angela sleeping reminded me of when I was a brand new dad. I would watch my daughter sleep and breathe. Angela reminded me a lot of my own daughter, Phoebe, and it sent a string of rising emotions through my heart and a tear ran from the corner of my eye. I needed to know Phoebe was safe. That my grandbabies were safe. It gave me a fresh resolve to escapee this madness.

I let Angela sleep for one more hour. Then I woke her and told her it was now or never.  Due to my hands being excessively sore, I have handed the writing back over to her.

We had formulated a plan. Reluctantly, she agreed to letting me head out of the bedroom first, armed with a clay paperweight that had been made for me by my grandson John. Again those damn emotions flooded my head. I had to pause a moment and concentrate. Bloody old age was making me weak. I assure you I am not a sappy bastard. I was once a strong man. You get to 82 and tell me how strong you are. OK, off the fucking track again.

I unlocked my door, then switched the paperweight to my right hand and opened the door with my left. I poked my head out an inch to search the hallway. No one was there so I opened the door fully. Angela stayed close behind me, hugging the shoe box of snow globes. I walked too painfully slowly for her. I knew this because I could feel her catching my heels each time I moved forward. I would suddenly stop and she'd run into me. I had to tell her to stop apologizing to me and to hang back a few feet. Eventually she got it. I don't blame her, man. This was scary stuff. I swear I could hear her heart beating along with mine

I got to the entrance of the dayroom and those things were still ambling around the room. Some had moved away from the TV and were just standing with a slight sway to their rigor mortis bodies. They reminded me of flag poles that had been warped by the sun and a slight breeze was making them sway around. My breathing grew heavy and it felt like a fucking anchor had landed on my chest. At first I thought I was having a heart attack. But I wasn't. I had just begun to hyperventilate without realizing it. Jesus, I was breathing so hard. The smell had escalated. Not only was bile irritating the back of my throat, but my nostrils literally burned from the smell.

There I was, inching alongside the sanguine splattered wall and crunching body debris underfoot. It felt as if we were traversing a fucking minefield. I could feel Angela's hot breath even through my sweatshirt. It was deathly cold, but neither of us felt cold. We were sweating so damn much it was like being in a sauna filled with rotten fish, cows, and God knows what else. The smell, that fucking smell. If those things didn't get us the smell would. We desperately needed to get outside. We continued the path along the wall, our bodies pressing harder against it to avoid as much of the crap around us as we could. Now, with shoes on, everything seemed louder. My eyes kept darting around the room and it was starting to make me feel dizzy.

We had reached the corner of the wall and I paused. I felt Angela tense up as I pushed my head around the corner and peaked through. Fucking George was still there. At that very moment I just wanted to charge at the bastard and remove his head, but I had to play it safe, for me as well as Angela. Neither of us knew what was on the other side of the exit door. I couldn't see past George enough to take a real good look. I pulled my head back in and took a long hard look around the room. I remember saying to

Angela that this is where the fun really starts. And the look of shock and worry that spread across her pretty face told me to reel it in.

Together we walked back across the wall line to the middle of the room. We had previously discussed our diversion tactics and it was now time to put them into action. I reached over and took two of the snow globes, one of Paris and the other of Australia. I held one in each hand, and when the moment was ripe, I chucked them at the far wall opposite us. Each globe smashed on impact. Water and glitter splattered about as if a child had just up-chucked the art room contents they'd consumed when the teacher had her back turned.

The loud crashing noise alerted most of the decaying walkers and they strode over in a fast yet clumsy way. One even walked right into the wall and half bounced off, giving us a giggle but also aiding in our diversion. I reached over and took two more snow globes out of the shoe box. These ones were of Christmas, one with Santa going down a chimney and the other a reindeer in a snowy forest. I looked at them with despair and then hurled them across the room. I hit one of the things in the head. It toppled back slightly but did not lose its footing. The rest in the room followed the noise and made their ungodly grunting noises as they all collided with one another.

I leaned over and grabbed two more globes. This time I aimed for the heads of the closest to the wall. It meant I had to somehow avoid the ones closest to us and get the ones further to the back of the room. I took a deep breath in and exhaled, albeit almost too loudly. I quickly chucked one of the globes and it hit an old woman in the head. She actually fell down. Boy, at that moment I wanted to jump up and down yelling out 'score.'

I hurled the next globe and got another one, though that old man didn't fall down. But he did stumble into the nearby gangrenous walkers. Now that they had all been herded into one room, we could lure out George. We carefully followed the length of the wall one more time, and at the corner I peeked my head around and looked right at him. I then checked to make sure the area down the length of the offices was clear. It was. I reached behind me, took Angela's hand into mine, and led her in. We went right down the other end of the hallway, and before stepping any further I had Angela wait. I continued and poked my head into the kitchen. It too was clear of rotters.

I walked quietly back to where Angela was and led her into the kitchen. There was a lockable door on it, so if things went south she knew she could lock herself in. She went to the cupboards and found some food. We ate a meal. We were starving. There wasn't much in the way of edible food that hadn't spoiled, but she did find two tins of beans. While that does give me a horrible stomach ache and makes me fart something chronic, I was too hungry to give a shit.

Afterwards I left my plate on the table, thinking back to what my own mother had taught me. Then I quickly but quietly picked up the plate and put it into the sink. Then I went out and stood in the door frame of the kitchen, looked right at George. I wondered how I would get his attention then it dawned on me. We were in a fucking kitchen. And what does a kitchen have apart from food, smart ass? It has knives. Big fucking butcher knives. I stepped back inside the kitchen and went straight to the knife block. Oh, what a beauty she was! A silver handled serrated blade; it was at least ten inches of stainless steel power. I rolled it from side to side inspecting it. My eyes caught Angela's, and together we grinned wide and bright.

I took an orange off the table and went to the door. Like a champion bowler I rolled that sucker all the way to George. It hit the tip of his brown slippers and instantly he looked down. "Damn it," I said out loud. Thankfully I had not said it that loudly. I grabbed another orange, but this time rather than rolling it I threw it. It missed George and went left of his decaying head. He looked my way, so I grabbed a bag of macaroni. It was the only thing I could think of that wouldn't make too much noise. I hoped it wouldn't lure the others out of the dayroom.

So there I was ripping open this bag of fucking macaroni and had just grabbed a handful to toss out the door when I saw that George was already moving toward me. I dropped the handful of macaroni and reached for the knife. But in my clumsy freaked-out state I tripped on my own two fucking feet and went down hard, knocking my noggin on the tiled floor. Angela screeched, but muffled the sound with her hands as she threw them to her mouth. I rolled onto my side and tried to pull myself up. Once I was up I had no time to grab the knife. That greedy bastard George had latched onto the back of my sweatshirt and was pulling me toward his dribbling mouth.

I kicked backwards like a wild horse. I made contact with George's leg and felt him loosen his grip, but goddamn it wasn't enough. He still held on

and was bringing me closer to his mouth. My panicked eyes caught Angela's tear-filled eyes. I wanted to scream at her to do something. I wanted to scold her for being a little sissy. But I couldn't. I just couldn't bring myself to tell her. I needed her safe, so instead of scolding her I told her to run, to get out and go while she had the chance. She gave me the most helpless look that I had ever seen. Run. I told her over and over to run. She just stood there frozen like a fucking statue.

George had won this battle due to my weak, injured, arthritic body. I could not fight him off and I felt his teeth sink into my back, ripping my sweatshirt away with my very flesh. I felt the hot rush of my blood pouring out like molten lava. He continued biting me. My damn skin just tore away like fucking sticky glue being melted away and then pulled upwards. Jesus, it hurt. Fucking hell, my back was being sliced wide open. I felt a hand go inside and grab at the tendons and muscles near my spine. It was then that I fought back. I didn't want my fucking spine pulled out of my body. I pushed myself forward. Sliding around on my own blood felt so weird. He had such a grip on me that when I went down I brought him down with me.

I remember turning around quickly, and at that time I wasn't sure if it was the stupidest mistake ever. As soon as I had flipped onto my back George burrowed down between my fucking legs, his mouth a mere inch from my jewels. And there was no way any man was going to bite my cock off, hell not while Viagra was still around. I fought tooth and nail to stop him, but I couldn't move. He had me pinned down, or at least he'd pinned my legs down with his gory monstrosity of a body lying on top of them. Thank God, he missed my precious jewels, but unfortunately for me he tore a section of my inner thigh out like he was stripping pork ribs.

I watched in horror as he tore through my pant leg and ripped out a piece of my thigh the size of a large jigsaw puzzle. He ate it right in fucking front of me. I felt like I was being scalped. Oh come on, I know that my thigh is not my fucking head, I'm old not stupid. He went in for another bite. I wormed and kicked out as much as I could. My hands grabbed a hold of his head and I pulled that sonofabitch so hard that I could literally feel his neck snap. "Weak cunt," I said out loud while pulling harder until his biting stopped and his head lolled to the side like a broken lollypop. I scooted backwards on my ass. I lifted my bleeding chewed up body until I was standing and grabbed the knife.

My damn eyes were only off his body for a split second, but it was long enough for the monster to regain his own strength and grab at my ankle. With a huge bite he had disabled me. I went crumbling down in excruciating pain. Lucky for me I was still clutching to the knife. I used every bit of strength I had left to shove the blade right through his decaying head. It vanished like it went into quicksand. His head had engulfed it and I couldn't get a grip on the handle with all the gooey, bloody shit that was spewing out the top of his head. He still bit down on my ankle, tearing away more of my flesh. Then suddenly the biting stopped and he fell forward, knocking his chin on my ankle before his face slumped limply sideways.

With watery eyes I looked up to see Angela still frozen to the same spot. She'd not moved a single muscle. I felt my own life begin to ebb away. With my last breath I told her again to run. I could hear the others. It was only a matter of time before they entered the kitchen. She had to go now or she was going to be stew meat. After a few more screams from me she finally moved. First it was just her eyes. Then her arms. Then it was if she breathed life back inside of herself and her legs moved. She walked over to me, knelt down beside me, and took the knife from my hand.

I feel faint. I've lost too much blood. I feel the fire of infection spreading rapidly through me. I can only yearn that Angela makes it out of here. I keep slipping in and out of consciousness, but I must finish my last entry.  I hope she comes back for this. I urge she keeps this journal, this record, alive. I plead she survives. I pray she can read my writing.

# Journal Entry - Day 23

It is Angela. I watched Ichabod Davenport die in front of me, at least right up till I had kissed him good bye. He saved me. My daughter and husband were uninfected by whatever virus plagued the world that day. I was reunited with them. We have been struggling to survive ever since, moving from one place to the other to avoid the infection.

Now this is my family's journey and I will continue writing in this journal for Ichabod. Documenting our survival.

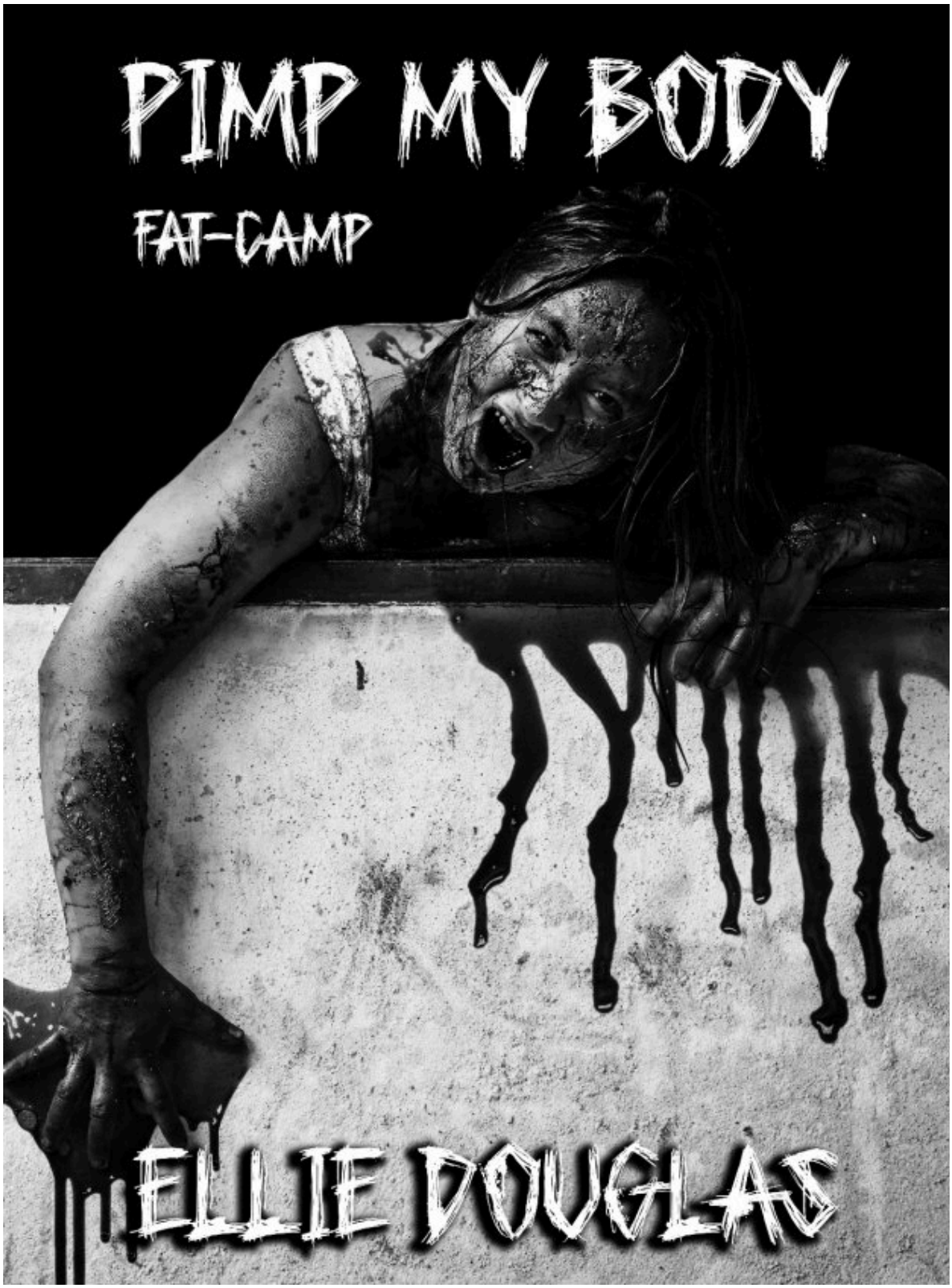
I will be forever grateful to Ichabod Davenport. He was my savior, my hero. May his soul rest in peace.

Crap I hear screaming. It is time to go. I am needed. I will be back tomorrow with more news. Unless I die, in which case someone will be reading this. Please do me a solid and continue writing in this journal for me, and for Ichabod. And more importantly for the world.

Be safe out there.

*Angela*

The End


PIMP MY BODY
FAT-CAMP
ELLIE DOUGLAS

# PIMP MY BODY

# What the Fuck...

Jo struggled feebly against the ropes. She could not climb the six foot rope wall without falling on her ass. She could hear the trainer yelling at her, but her mind drowned Tammy out. All she could really think about was the chocolate bar she'd hidden under her pillow. The trainer yelling at her did not motivate her. She simply could not pull her weight to climb the ropes. Every time she shifted she could feel her skin being pulled taut by the ropes as they tangled in her feet and hands, threatening to split her skin wide open.

"Jo?" Jo looked around sharply, only half-sure she'd heard her name. "Jo!" Again she swore she heard her name. She turned her head and her eyes fell flat on Tammy who was staring back at her.

"Jo, you better move it. You know what happens if you fail the obstacle course."

"I know. I don't care. I quit," Jo said breathlessly.

"Little piggies don't quit. Get up and pull that fat ass up the damn ropes."

"Just leave me alone."

"No, damn it. I'm trying to help you. You signed up for this, remember?"

"Yes. But I didn't sign up for the verbal abuse, name calling, and the damn punishments."

"Oh, but you did Jo. When you signed the contract you signed yourself over to us; to me and my brother Tommy. We get to treat you how we see fit. If we feel you need motivating, we motivate. Now move it piggy. Oink. Oink. Oink."

"For God's sake just give me a fucking minute to get some strength. There is no way I'm climbing that. I'll go under and you can punish me all you want."

Jo took in several deep breaths and stood up. Her bulk spilled out of her spandex while she got onto her knees and pulled her body into a crawl. Jo pushed and shoved as hard as she could to get under the ropes. Parts of the ropes snagged on her ponytail. As she moved forward they pulled her hair with them. She cried out in pain but carried on. Jo was determined to show Tammy she wasn't a pig.

Tammy walked along the side, jeering her on, ridiculing her, and demeaning her into motivation. It worked. Jo got through underneath the ropes, stood upright and carried on course. She struggled to breathe and had to stop every twenty steps to catch her breath. Each time she stopped, Tammy would yell at her to keep going. At the end of the course, the other five fat-campers were sitting down, breathing hard, and sweating profusely. Jo wondered if she looked as bad as them; then she decided she didn't want to know.

"Now that Jo has finally finished this obstacle course, you can all head back to your rooms, take a shower, and meet Tommy and me in the gym."

"We're not done for the day?" James gasped through large gulps of air, still trying to regulate his breathing.

"No, you aren't finished for the day," Tammy said with a demented smirk.

The group of six moaned and whined under their breaths as each of them made their way back to their rooms. The land was flat, consisting of sixty-five acres that ended at the Newton County Forest. There were two houses and a barn that had been turned into a large gym. The main house had eight bedrooms and the other house had two. Tammy and Tommy broke into a run and headed to the gym to get everything prepared for the next work out.

"This is one sorry bunch of fatties," Tammy exclaimed while she effortlessly moved a kettle bell into place. She moved another and then put out some gym mats. Tommy had just about finished up with the ropes and weights when suddenly he dropped to the wooden floors, clasping a hand to his neck and screaming.

"What the hell is wrong with you, brother?"

"I think a spider just bit me. Can you look at it for me?"

Tommy got to his feet still putting pressure on the bite. He stood in front of his sister and removed his hand. He watched her face change as her eyes grew a fraction wider.

"What? Tammy? What is it?"

"I'm no doctor, but I think you were just bitten by a fucking vampire!"

"Don't be such a bitch! What the fuck do you see?"

"Wait. Tommy, don't move." Tammy quickly pulled off her shoe and sock. She slid her hand inside the sock and approached Tommy. He stood as still as a statue, unable to hide his fear. He wanted to ask her what it was,

but now he was too scared to open his mouth. Tammy got closer and raised her socked hand and formed a pinch shape. Tommy held his breath. He wanted to close his eyes but he had to see what it was she was removing from him. He did not like spiders. His heart skipped several beats and he desperately wanted to tell her to hurry up. His legs began to quiver and he feared he'd fall. He warily watched his sister's careful movements. Tammy worked her hand to the side of his throat and suddenly grabbed a bright red wasp. She pinched it tightly between her socked fingers and tossed it to the floor, stomping on it with her foot until it was dead.

"What the fuck was that?" Tommy gibbered.

"Some kind of wasp. I've never seen one like that before. It was so fucking red it was like the color of your blood." She laughed as she walked off to grab some towels for the campers.

"Fuck you!" Tommy scolded like a spoiled child. He wanted to hit her, but instead took his anger out on the punching bag.

"You are such a fucking baby!" Tammy grumbled. She looked around the room and made sure everything was in place. The six piggies would be arriving shortly. She filled her water bottle up from the water cooler. She walked outside, sat down on the gym steps, and gazed up at the night sky. Tommy joined her, but he kept his distance from his sister as he rubbed his sore neck. They waited in silence for the six members to arrive. Twenty minutes later they showed up. Each of them carried the face of a person who had just lost a loved one, and it amused Tammy.

Throughout the weigh-in Tommy was quiet and not his usual bubbly self. Usually, whenever Tammy would ridicule one of the contestants for not losing any weight, he would step in afterwards to make the person feel better. But not this time; this time he was angry and silent.

"Right fatties, we have some big news for you all. Do you want to tell them, or should I?" Tammy asked. Tommy didn't answer his sister. Instead, he glared right through her and waved his hands testily at her to carry on.

"Very well then. Listen up you lot. You think today was grueling? You have no idea what real work is. Tomorrow you will all be up at the crack of dawn, and you'll be doing a zombie run. Fifty men and women will be arriving at 6 a.m., and they will be made up to look like zombies. You little piggies will have to run and run. If you are incapable of running, you may hide. But be warned. If you are taken down you will have to start over."

“Why do we need to get up so early if the zombies aren’t even ready? Won’t they need to be in make-up first?” Kat asked sarcastically.

“Do you have wax in those flappy ears of yours? I said they will be made up. But obviously I have to spell that out for you. It means they are arriving already made up. Now, are there any more dumbass questions?”

Tammy looked the six of them up and down. She was disgusted by the sight of them. Her mission was to make them all lose those extra pounds and turn them into something more beautiful. She always succeeded. Her cruelty and name calling had a psychological effect. She knew she was hated; she always was in the beginning. But by week four she was praised for her toughness, and by week six she was regarded as the queen of weight loss. She sneered and suddenly barked orders at the six men and women. They jumped when she raised her voice.

“You have three hours before dinner. You will do one hour of running on the treadmills. Then a half-hour of squats, rope work, and kettle bells. If I see any of you walking, I will punish you. And trust me, you won’t like my punishments.”

The six members made sure they had a full water bottle and a towel. Once Tammy blew her whistle they knew to start. Each of them stood on the treadmills and started a slow jog. They pushed themselves to go a little faster with each passing minute. James had gotten into a good rhythm, but soon his lungs burned and his breathing was frantic. He collapsed and shot off the treadmill like a human rocket.

“Well. Well. Well. What do we have here? Get up and move it, or start again. Believe me James, we can go all night long,” Tammy jeered while watching the others. The other two men, Bruce and Asher, were trotting like perfect pigs. She cast her eyes to the three women, Kat, Jo, and Ann, who were walking instead of running. It made Tammy furious.

“I said run!” Tammy yelled at the ladies, spooking them as she sneaked up behind them. Ann began to cough. Her chest felt tight and she felt like she was having a heart attack. She slowed down and then jumped her feet to the sides of the treadmill, holding onto the rails tightly. She was hyperventilating. Tammy observed closely. Once she knew Ann wasn’t in any real danger, she gave her another minute to catch her breath then demanded she get back on and run.

“Run before I catch you little piggies.” Tammy circled herself around the six of them, screaming reminders to run. Kat stopped to vomit. James

fell off a second, then a third time. Each time he slammed his bulk onto the treadmill reminded Tammy of a whale trying to hump another whale. Tammy noticed her brother Tommy had taken a seat by the exit door and was holding his head between his knees. She glanced at the campers. They were in a nice trot, so she headed to Tommy.

"What's up with you little brother?"

"If you are going to chastise me, then just fuck off now," Tommy growled in a low voice.

Tammy refrained from more torment when she caught a glimpse of Tommy's face. She stood closer and placed her small hands on either side of his head, tilting his head up. She gasped at the sight of him.

"Jesus, you better get yourself to a doctor. I can call you a cab."

"No, I'll be all right. That fucking wasp. I think I was allergic to it or something."

"You think? Christ's sake, Tommy, your face has doubled in size and that area on your neck where it stung you looks like it's infected or something."

Tammy turned her head sharply when she heard a thump. She saw Jo on the floor in a heap. She turned back to her brother. For the first time in a long time, Tommy saw her eyes showing a smidgen of empathy.

"Go to your room, Tommy. I'll handle them. I hate to say it, but you look like roadkill." Tommy tried to smile but his face hurt too much. He got up and made his way to his room. Tammy went back to the contestants and urged them to run faster. When they finished with the treadmill she had them do other activities before letting them stop.

"Go shower and rest. Dinner will be served in one hour," She commanded and watched as each of them waddled out of the gym. Tammy put away the equipment and went over to the main house. The ground floor had a recreational room on the right and to the left it had a kitchen with a large dining area. Sue and Zed were busy in the kitchen, carefully preparing a calorie controlled dinner.

"So, which of you want to clean vomit?"

Both of them stopped what they were doing and gave Tammy a shocked look. Neither of them wanted that task. But they knew when they applied for the job that it meant having to clean up vomit. Sue and Zed did what they always did; they tossed a coin to decide. Heads for Sue, tails for Zed.

The coin was handed to Tammy, who enjoyed tossing it into the air, catching it, and slamming it on the back of her hand.

"Tails," Tammy called out loudly. Sue mumbled yes under her breath, but both Zed and Tammy heard. They giggled. Zed hung up his apron and grabbed the mop and bucket. He trotted off with his head down complaining about loosing.

He hadn't gotten far across the manicured lawn of the complex when he suddenly fell to the ground screaming. He rolled on the ground in agony, shrieking, "My eye! My eye!" Tammy rushed to Zed's side and was trying to find out what had happened. Sue also left the kitchen and went to see what Zed was howling at.

"Zed, if you don't stop screaming I will fucking hit you."

"Something stung my eye. Oh God, I can't see. I'm blind!"

"Stop panicking and let me take a look," Tammy insisted while she tried to pry Zed's hands from his face so she could see. Tammy lowered her head and bit down on the back of Zed's hand and he suddenly let go.

"What the hell? You fucking bit me!"

"It was the only way to get you to let go of your face. Now let me take a look."

Tammy leaned in and inspected his eye. She noticed the red welt on his upper right eyelid and saw something prickly sticking out. She reached to remove it, but Zed suddenly jostled backwards, causing Tammy to fall on him. She righted herself and then sat across his chest, pinning him to the ground.

"Hold his hands, Sue."

Sue got behind his head and stretched her arms out to pin his hands down. He was bucking and Tammy was almost knocked off while Sue struggled to keep him still.

"Oh for fuck's sake! Stop acting like a cunt and stay still. I need to get the thing off your of your eye"

"Thing? What thing?"

"How should I know? I won't know until you let me take it out." Tammy could feel Zed quieting down, and she leaned forward and pulled the needle-like prickle from his eyelid. It resisted. She pulled harder and felt Zed tense underneath her tiny frame. "Almost got it," she mouthed. With one more hard pull she managed to extract it. Tammy immediately brought it closer to her eyes for a better look. She twisted and twirled it sideways.

“It looks like a bee-stinger, only longer and thicker,” Tammy declared before sliding off of Zed. Her eyes darted across the ground searching and something red caught her eye. She motioned toward it. As she got closer she could see the wasp’s body twitching on the ground. She promptly stomped on it.

“Killed it,” she gloated, turning to look at Zed.

“Killed what exactly?” Sue questioned with a look of muddlement across her freckled face.

“I’m not a bug expert, but it looks like a wasp. I believe that is what stung your eye.”

“So, I’m withering and screaming like a spanked toddler over a goddamned wasp?”

“If it helps you sleep tonight, it was no ordinary wasp. It was red, and I mean blood red, in its coloring. It had extra-long antennae and it was massive compared to other wasps. Bigger than any I’ve ever seen,” Tammy said while making her way to back to the main house. She noticed that all six of the members were watching them from the doorway.

“Come on Sue, we have work to do,” Tammy called out while making her way inside. The six members all backed away from the door. Each of them had questioning looks smeared across their faces like war paint.

“Right behind you, Tammy. Just helping Zed to his room.”

Tammy fumed. Her brother was down and now Zed. She didn’t know how she’d manage everything on her own.

“Just hurry back for shit’s sake!” Tammy stomped inside and went straight to the kitchen, avoiding the doubtful looks. She looked down at the prep table and finished what Zed and Sue had started. She plated up thirty grams of grilled chicken and a salad without dressing. She placed a slice of gluten free bread on each plate, along with a Solo cup half filled with vinegar and lemon juice for the salad if they wanted it. She began placing the plates on the long marble bench, and one-by-one she had the members collect them.

“Tammy, what happened to Zed?’ Bruce politely asked.

“He was stung by some kind of wasp. Now no more talk about it. He’ll be fine. Eat up, because you need your rest. Tomorrow will be a killer day,” Tammy sneered. When Sue returned, Tammy made herself a chicken sandwich and went to her own room.

# Zombie Run

The group of fifty had arrived at 6:01 a.m. They were all eager. The race was held across the grounds leading into the Newton County Forest, and began with queueing in the cold morning outside the gym. The six members were given Fitbits and a clip-on belt. The belt had three green tags velcroed to it which represented their lives. The dressed up zombies would lunge for the flags as they ran. The team was astounded at the work that went into the makeup. The six of them sat and ate their allocated breakfast. When they were finished they were allowed a twenty minute break before things started.

Twelve men dressed as soldiers led the six campers to the starting point. During the race there would be 20 zombies placed in various areas and hidden out of sight. They needed time to get into position. While they were doing that, the team was taken through the rules. Since there were a total of 30 zombies, they could relieve each other frequently, remaining fresh and ready to catch the members.

“If all of your flags are taken you must return to the starting point and be given a new set of flags,” Tammy said excitedly.

“How many times will we have to do the run?” Asher queried as he stood shivering in the cold.

“The race lasts all day. From now until sundown,” Tammy gloated.

“What about food, toilet and drink breaks?” Kat protested anxiously.

“There will be a 15 minute break every two hours. When you hear this siren you’ll know it’s time for a break.” Tammy waved her hands to one of the crew and he flicked a switch that let off an air raid siren. The group covered their ears quickly. The alarm was shut down with another wave from Tammy’s petite arm.

“There are only six of us and more of them. How’s that fair?” Bruce blurted out.

“Life is unfair. Get used to it,” Tammy boomed, then moved to the side. She let one of the soldiers take over. Suddenly there was shouting from the soldiers and the first gag-inducing smoke bombs were released. Immediately the group started to walk off slowly, coughing and spluttering while rubbing the smoke from their eyes. Tammy waited for the smoke to

settle and intently watched the six members as they slowly waddled away. They weren't running and it pissed her off.

"Lard asses are too fucking fat to run," she blurted, ensuring the team of six heard her.

The rest of the crew that had arrived were readying the makeup for when it melted off the zombies. It reminded Tammy of the crews waiting to change the tires of cars on a racecourse. She was more than excited; she stood on tip toes and could still see the six members clambering forward far too slowly. She realized that they must have planned to restrain themselves from running too early. She thought that was smart of them. But soon the first group of zombies would be racing up to them and then they would have to run. She grew more and more excited. Unable to contain herself, she giggled out loud.

Jo had a Lion King moment, rushing forward like a distressed wildebeest along the dirt path and swerving into the brush of a nearby bush to avoid a grasping arm. All she could hear were grunts and screams, along with the occasional gunshot from the soldiers. She wondered if they were real bullets for a moment. She shook off her thoughts as the pretend zombie ambled closer toward her and snatched at her waist. His nimble fingers caught a flag and ripped it from her belt. She looked dumbfounded at him and carried on.

Tammy looked toward the team. She could see Jo was being chased and she could have sworn she saw both Zed and Tommy out there.

"That can't be right," she said aloud. No one answered her. None of the crew members near her knew if she was addressing them or not so no one answered. Tammy shrugged her slim shoulders and pulled her blond ponytail tighter. She turned for a second to grab her water bottle, and suddenly shot her head toward the group when she heard a hair-rising scream.

"Damn, those actors are really putting on a great show," she said aloud again. One of the crewmembers nodded politely, then carried on with the preparations for getting the drone into the air. When he'd completed that he sent the drone up, controlling it with a miniature controller while watching on a 15-inch monitor he'd hooked up. Tammy had a seat near the screen and watched with anticipation.

One of the crew dressed as a nurse zombie was pulled down so violently that she cracked her wrist when she tired to brace herself. She howled out in

pain and kicked herself backwards when the thing loomed over her like a predatory beast. It wasted no time and was on top of her in seconds, biting into her upper chest, neck, and face. In a matter of thirty seconds it had torn her apart.

"What the hell? What's going on? I want eyes on the ground now! Can't you take the drone down lower?" Tammy demanded.

"No, Miss. There are too many trees in that area. I can move it down over there." The man pointed showing an area that Tammy knew no one in their right mind would go toward. It was far too exposed. She threw her hands on her hips and stood up abruptly. "Let me at the controller," she urged.

The guy with a handlebar moustache gave her a look of 'sit the fuck back down,' but Tammy didn't care. She was like a spoiled brat, getting her way no matter what. She reached over and tried to snatch the controller out of the man's hand. She suddenly stopped and listened to more screams and got more anxious about taking the drone in for a look.

"Hand me the fucking controller or you're fired."

The man looked toward his superior. With a nod from him, he handed her the controller.

"If that breaks you have to buy another. Do you know how much they are?"

"I don't care if it costs a million dollars. If it breaks you have my word I'll buy you a replacement. Just show me how to use this." The man known as Jack showed her the basic controls and watched her take over. Looking over at the monitor, he could see three overweight people running for cover. The drone got lower and he could see them heading for a large area of trees. He swallowed hard, knowing if she took the drone into the trees she would lose it. He was right. Within three minutes she had crashed the drone and roughly shoved the controller back into his hands.

"That thing is a piece of crap. Now how are we going to watch them?"

"I guess if you want to see them up close and personal, you'll have to go after them and watch them with your own eyes," Jack spat as he tossed the controller onto the makeshift table and walked away.

Tammy was left standing there unsure of what to do. Suddenly she took off. She had to be in the thick of the action. She had to see what was happening with her own eyes, and had to yell at the six team members. So she bolted. For a little 5'1 woman, she could ran fast.

# For Real...

“Ann, come this way,” Kat called after Ann. But Ann hadn’t heard and had ducked into a thicker area of the forest. Kat jumped when she heard distant screams, gunshots, and grunting noises. She couldn’t stop jumping at every noise she heard. She was shaking and out of breath. Her bulk prevented her from climbing anything, so she was left to find a tree large enough to hide behind so that she could catch her breath. She nearly jumped a foot off the ground when she felt a hand grab her shoulder.

“Shush, they will hear us,” Bruce whispered as he firmly pulled Kat back against the tree.

“Flippin’ heck man, you nearly made me shit my pants.” Kat put her large chubby hands to her chest and felt her heart skip. Her face was bright red, and was blotched in places with an even darker red. She looked at Bruce and cringed. He’d sweated right through his tee-shirt and his dark hair was practically glued down. It made his hair look like a sloppy toupee.

“I’m sorry, Kat, but if I can see you, they will too,” Bruce said in a low whisper that left Kat straining to hear him over her own rapid heartbeat.

“What’d ya say?”

“Never mind. Let’s go. We gotta keep moving or they will find...”

Out of nowhere a decaying arm grabbed onto Bruce so fast that he fell forward and pushed Kat into the tree. She hit it so hard that she almost passed out. Kat noticed the smell first. She let out a cry and tried to push Bruce off of her. Zed was biting hard into his back, up near the shoulder blades. Bruce’s eyes pleaded with Kat to help him. She hadn’t realized that it was Zed, not with how he now looked. In her mind it was one of the crew in makeup.

His body had turned gray. His eyes were white globs of nothingness, and his skin had a quilted scaly look to it. Smears of blood tarnished his skin. There were rips in his skin and parts of his flesh hung like beef jerky. She saw all of this, but in her mind none of it registered as being real.

“Come on man, get off me. This isn’t funny. Just take our flags and let us go,” Kat begged. “Come on, please!” she said again. This time her eyes caught something that her brain couldn’t fathom. “How? What? No fucking way!” she shrieked when she saw it again. Pieces of bone mingled with Bruce’s flesh were being flung into the air, and copious amounts of blood shot out of Bruce’s body splashing and spraying the surrounding area.

Bruce's body twitched turbulently. Kat could see out the corner of her eye movement on the ground and thought Bruce was making a run for it. She tried to yell at him to stop, to help her but the movement grew more fierce. Zed was feasting on her like a pig on the spit. Bruce was vigorously twitching on the ground, leaves and twigs were tossed around like a miniature tornado. His bones started to break and split through parts of his flesh, he screamed out but not in anything human sounding. To Kat he sounded like a baboon being mauled by a grizzly bear.

Kat didn't want to look down but her eyes took control. When she did look she instantly vomited. Then she screamed and screamed until her throat hurt. Before she had a chance to scream a third time, Zed flung Bruce's body off of Kat, pounced on her like a cougar, and ripped her throat out.

It all happened too fast. Her throat had been torn out, and during that time Bruce had transformed into the same thing that Zed was. As soon as his unsteady 458-pound body stood, he slammed right into Zed and Kat, forcing her so hard into the tree that the back of her skull caved in. Kat's eyes rolled up and backwards before popping forwards like a loose spring. Zed couldn't move. He was pinned down with Bruce's bulk. Bruce used his powerful arms and tore Kat's head off in a swift move. As soon as he had decapitated her, he sat on the ground and began sucking her brain through the large gaping hole that he'd made with his talons.

Zed wasted no time and feasted on Kat's jumbo 398-pound body. He started with her enormous breasts, ripping into them and shredding them like buckwheat. He moved inside her chest, ripping it apart as his jaws of death masticated on her muscles, tissue, and flesh in a shark-like frenzy. By the time they had finished there was not much left of Kat. A few strands of hair and nails scattered the forest floor. A partial femur bone and gristle from her nose had fallen to the ground, and somehow they had missed one of her ears. It lay on the dirt as if listening to the earth beneath.

Three of the dressed up zombies sat just a short distance from where Kat's remains soaked into the ground. For the last half hour they had gone through four cigar -sized joints.  They were giggling and carrying on like school boys. None of them heard the rustling of leaves, nor had they seen what was coming. Zed and Bruce sprung out of nowhere and bowled over two of the three men. The third got to his drugged-up feet and stumbled face first into a tree, knocking out his front teeth. He spat them to the ground and bolted as fast as his legs could carry him, only to collide with Asher who was running in the opposite direction. They smashed head-on into one another. Asher's 490-pound weight sent the squirrely man flying backwards, knocking the wind right out of

him. Asher kept going as fast as his enormous legs would allow, right into the path of Zed and Bruce. All Asher could see was the two men on the ground kneeling next to one of the pretend zombies. Somehow, Asher's brain perceived the surreal blood splatter as part of the Zombie Run props.

"Bruce? Damn it, Bruce, stop mucking around dude. They will take your flags. Let's go." When Asher got no reply he walked up to Bruce and tugged on his massive back, getting his attention. When Bruce turned his head and saw Asher, he let go of the man's intestines. Cruor and gunk dribbled down his chin as he latched onto Asher's arm. He pulled him down and splayed himself on top to pin him in place while he feasted. Asher reached into his pocket, pulled out a pen, and shoved it hard into Bruce's eye. He watched the eye squirt out a liquid mixed with blood, but it didn't stop Bruce from tearing into his flesh. Asher bellowed as loudly as his weakened lungs would allow. He felt every muscle tense with each ferocious bite.

Asher used his bulk and kneed him in the groin to try to get him off, but Bruce didn't even budge. Again he sunk his teeth into Asher's collar bone, and Asher felt every penetrating tear of his flesh being ripped apart with teeth Bruce didn't have an hour before. The teeth he had now were monstrous, razor sharp, and broken like an old picket fence. Asher also felt long talons digging into his sides like sharp steak knives. The man on him now was not the Bruce he'd befriended just one day ago; now it was a monster he didn't recognise. Asher screamed out. "They are for real! They are for real!" he said over and over.

A noise from two feet away caught Bruce's attention and he sprung off Asher and dashed after the man dressed as a zombie. The man could be heard yelling as he ran away. Asher held onto his wounds and lay there catching his breath, trying to comprehend what had just happened. Suddenly Zed yanked Asher to his feet and bit into the side of his face, tearing his ear and eye out in one violent insane fit. Asher felt his eye being ripped from his face. The sound it made permeated through his brain and made him thrash around like a fish out of water. He put up a fight kicking, pulling, and smashing his fists into Zed. But it was of no use. Zed was ten times stronger and had eaten most of Asher's face.

Suddenly he stopped when Jo hit him powerfully across the head with a big stick she'd found on the forest floor. She quickly knelt down next to Asher, applying pressure to parts of his body. She felt sick at the sight of his wounds. Bone was protruding through his chest and his empty, bloody eye socket completely turned her inside out. She let go and rolled over and vomited all over Zed. When she finished she turned back to Asher and screamed.

Asher's body was twitching so aggressively that she could hear his bones snapping inside. Too shocked to move, she screamed more when Zed started to sit upright, like a corpse in a morgue suddenly sitting up and gasping for air. Zed bolted up and reached for Jo. She quickly rolled out of the way and grabbed her stick. Jo swung it hard into his face, knocking him backwards. It gave her time to get to her feet. She got three feet away when she was knocked backwards with so much force she felt as though an elephant had kicked her off her feet.

She lay there gasping for air. Tears streamed down her round face before she closed her eyes tight, willing the beast away. When she felt the first bite on her upper thigh, she let out a horrific yowl. Somehow she found some strength within, opened her eyes, and fought back. Her leg was being gnawed on by Zed, but it was when Asher joined in that she fainted. Her body was dragged around the forest floor in a tug of war between the two. She was being drawn and quartered. It took only a few minutes before her body was ripped in half. Her torso had bits straggling out of it like loose squid tentacles while her legs splattered excessive amounts of blood around like a high powered water hose.

James was running from one of the dressed up zombies and managed to elude him enough to take a quick breather. His 569-pound body struggled and he'd lost two flags already. He wasn't going to be made to do the course again, so decided he'd find the other five members and steal a flag from them. He guzzled down his bottle of water and tossed it aside. It hit a tall tree and bounced off, catching the attention of one of the actors. James heard him before he saw him and started running. His bulk hindered him and his feet hit the ground like a stampede. He could be heard from a long way off. Twigs and branches crashed beneath him as he stomped through the forest.

The actor chased after James and quickly caught up, jumping right onto his back. James tried to throw the man off until he felt scalpel-like teeth sinking into the back of his neck. He hollered out and circled around, bucking harder to get the man off of him. The guy hung on and again buried his face into James's neck, ripping and tearing his flesh off in long, jagged strips. James tried to reach his hands back to pull at the man's legs, but his fat arms couldn't stretch far enough behind. He fell backwards, crushing the man beneath him. He rolled off of him as fast as his large size allowed. He grabbed the closest stick and rammed it repeatedly into the man's throat. He wouldn't stop bludgeoning the man until he finally stopped twitching. James gasped and felt as though his lungs were constricting. He couldn't breathe. He dropped the stick and fell backwards, heaving. The exertion he used to kill the man brought on a heart attack.

He gripped his chest tightly as he wheezed and dribbled. The pain ricocheted around his body. Within seconds he was dead. After a few more seconds, he came back to life; except he was no longer human. His teeth grew longer and sharper. Talons grew out of his fingers. His skin paled and became a deathly gray before parts of his body split into a jigsaw mess of sores. He sprung to his feet with more agility than he'd ever had as a human and rushed through the forest sniffing out fresh blood.

Tommy had Ann's scent locked in and had followed her over a great distance around the forest. She had somehow managed to dodge him and ended up back towards the path leading to the gym. Tommy sniffed the air and suddenly locked onto another smell. Forgetting Ann, he rushed after the closer smell and ran right into Tammy.

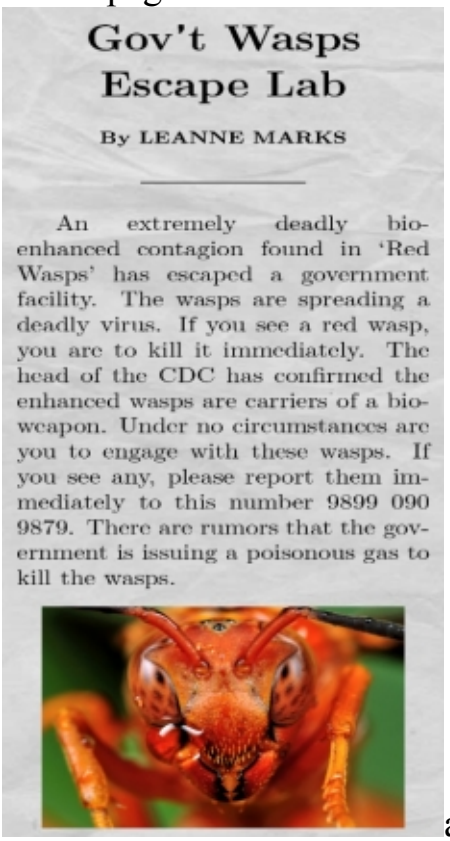
"When the hell did they do your zombie makeup?" Tammy screeched at her brother. "Damn it, Tommy, tell me." Again he didn't answer. Instead, he only grunted. Tommy made a grab for Tammy but she backed away quickly. He advanced forward again and again she backed away. "Listen you little shit, if you don't stop playing games I will fucking hurt you." Tommy grunted louder and lunged at Tammy, surprising her with his speed and spryness. He grabbed ahold of her tee-shirt, which tore when she pulled herself free. "Brother or not, you can't catch me, dip-shit." She ran and he was close on her tail. No matter how far she thought she was ahead he was right behind her.

She was almost blind as she ran. Her adrenaline was pumping through her like hot chili peppers. She bumped into a man dressed as a doctor wearing a stethoscope and covered in splattered blood. She could tell his makeup was fake – or at best the blood splatter was. She looked twice, then a third time and almost wet herself. His eyes couldn't be contacts; they looked too real. He was grunting much the same as her brother. Tammy's fear took over.

Tammy didn't stop running. Kicking up leaves and debris, her high level of fitness helped her gain some distance from whatever was chasing her. She could still sense their presence and it was freaking her out. She couldn't think straight. What she saw felt real, but part of her mind tried to convince her that they were all in on some sick joke meant to scare the hell out of her. For all intents and purposes, it worked. She was terrified. She'd never dare admit that to them.

She was nearing the opening of the forest and came across another batch of groaning, limp-limbed creatures. She ploughed right through them. They too gave chase. Their heads snapped in her direction and their arms grabbed at her. She felt the sting of sharp cuts as some taloned fingernails snagged her flesh. She kept on going. She reached the gym and skidded to a halt. She tried

desperately to back-peddle her way out of the menacing group she now faced. Tammy didn't know what was real and fake anymore. Her mind pictured them all as a gladiatorial gauntlet of reanimated corpses. Tammy passed Ann – or what was left of her – and it was then that she realised that something far more sinister was taking place.

She rushed to the house and slammed the door behind her. She didn't stop. She raced upstairs and locked herself into one of the bathrooms. She turned the tap on and splashed cold water over her face and regulated her breathing. Once she felt calm enough she grabbed her cell phone from her pocket and dialled 111. She panicked when no one picked up the phone. There was no operator to put her call through to the police. She heard nothing but a continuous ring. She hung up and slammed the phone on the counter. She quickly snatched it back up and went to a news page. She almost collapsed when she read the headlines, followed by the 

Gov't Wasps Escape Lab

By LEANNE MARKS

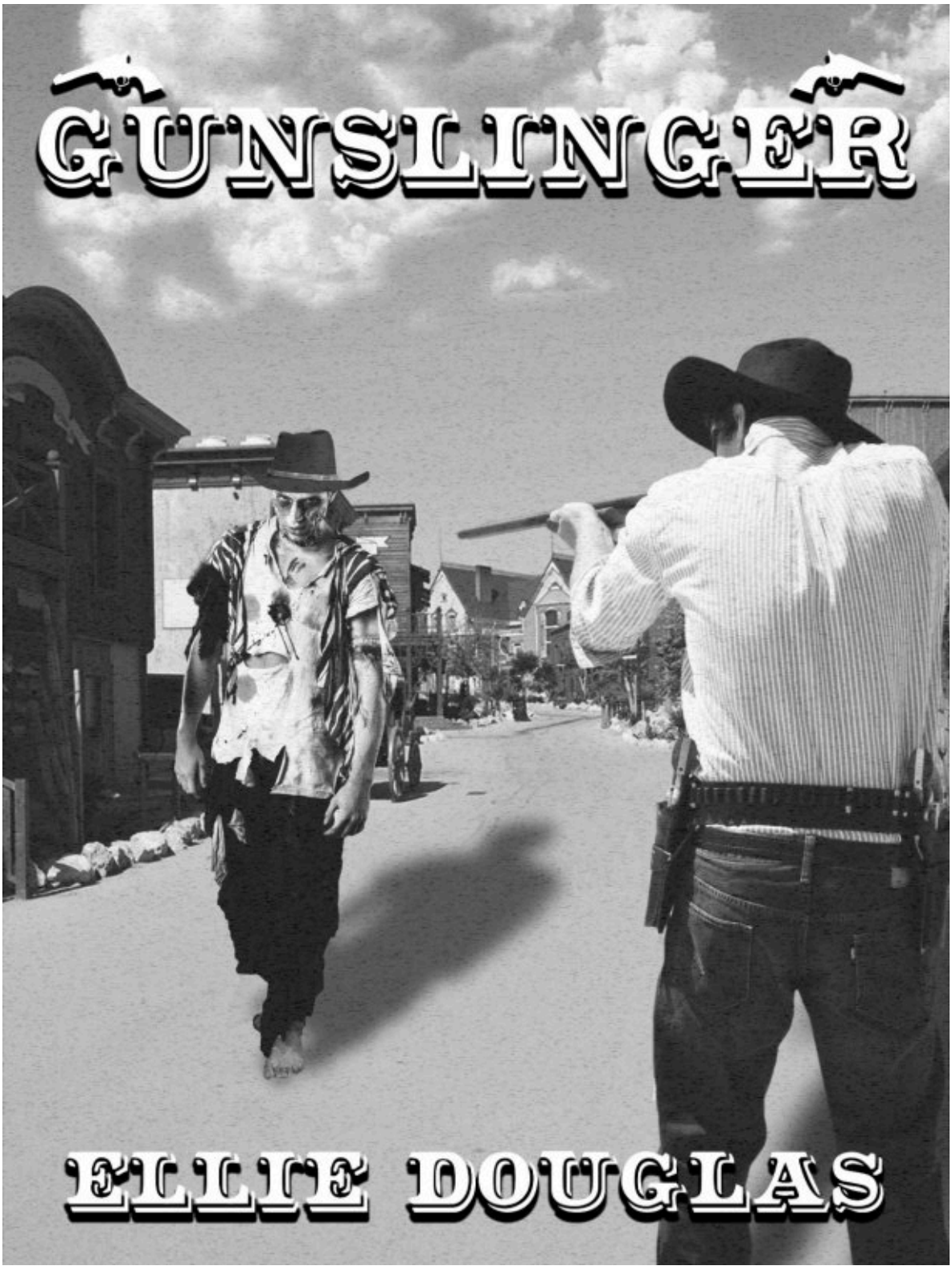
An extremely deadly bio-enhanced contagion found in 'Red Wasps' has escaped a government facility. The wasps are spreading a deadly virus. If you see a red wasp, you are to kill it immediately. The head of the CDC has confirmed the enhanced wasps are carriers of a bio-weapon. Under no circumstances are you to engage with these wasps. If you see any, please report them immediately to this number 9899 090 9879. There are rumors that the government is issuing a poisonous gas to kill the wasps.

article.

Tammy kept searching her cell, finding more and more headlines with similar stories. She went to her local news site and listened to a live broadcast. It was then that she found out the true nature of those creatures. Not knowing what to do next she sat there for a moment. Tammy was startled when her phone rang. She looked at the caller ID and answered quickly.

"Mom?"

The End


GUNSLINGER
ELLIE DOUGLAS

# GUNSLINGER

# 1845 The Beginning

“Please Pa, read another story,” Jesse begged as he climbed out of his thin bed and scampered onto his Pa’s knees.

“Just one more,” Fred said as he scooped his seven- year- old up and put him back into bed, tucked him in, and then lit his pipe.

“Make it another real one, Pa.”

“All my stories are real, son,” he said as he puffed on his pipe and began his story.

“Even the monsters, Pa?”

“Even the monsters. Best you hush down now, otherwise I can’t tell ya the story.”

Jesse turned to face his Pa and propped a hand under his cheek while he watched the smoke from the pipe drift into the air. He listened intently and hoped his Pa would talk about the ‘Black Death.’ When he started to do just that, Jesse grew more anxious to hear the end. The last time his Pa had told this story Jesse had fallen asleep.

“The thing is, Jesse, the ‘Black Death’ was not what was written in the history books. Oh no, son, the real truth was hidden from the world. The real reason nearly 200 million people throughout Eurasia, and eventually the Americas, died.”

“Where we live?”

“Exactly.”

“Why, Pa? What happened?”

“You see son, there was talk of the plague having started by small insects like the flea that lived off the black rats. But it wasn’t that. It was from black bats that had colonies in many caves around the world. These bats were what started the rumors of vampires. You remember that story, don’t you son?”

“Yes, it was one of my favorites, Pa.”

“Well these bats were infected with something far more sinister than anything the world had ever encountered. You see son, the bacteria within them mutated with the cells within our own bodies, making us very sick. But it wasn’t just sickness carried by a mutated gene that altered our cells. The Black Death was given that name because if you got it you died. There was no cure. The thing is, son, the dead didn’t stay dead. That is why they

are keeping it a secret. They didn't want the world to panic, not after the rumors of vampires had already spread. It was once believed that if you had the Black Death that you turned into a vampire, because those that died from the Black Death would rise up and bite you. They couldn't die, and would feast on anything living. They decimated the populations of more than just the human race."

"Pa, if they can't die, then what happened to them? We don't see them now, do we?"

"You're a smart boy, Jesse. A very intelligent man called Earl Carter found out one day purely by accident that they could die if you caused enough damage to their head. Once word had gotten out that it was possible, people everywhere started killing the infected. But not all are dead, so to speak. Some of them are known to have been buried alive, and some were caught in mining avalanches and buried alive too." Jesse gasped at the thought.

"Pa, if they are buried alive, does that mean they can still come back and infect all of us?"

"It is true, son. If someone were to dig up the earth for a new house, a well, or even a railroad, they very well could be digging up the dead. They were called earth breathers, because they had risen from the earth. Now no one knows where they are buried. No maps were left behind, and no one left alive to tell where they were. We don't even know how many of them are out there in the world. It could be hundreds, or it could be millions. It has been four hundred and ninety two years."

"Could it all be a lie, Pa?"

"Given the passage of time, it could be. But I have it on good authority that it is true."

"Says who?"

"Your great uncle Wyatt. He was friends with another chap, Billy Jonas, and he was friends with the grandfather of a gunfighter named Ken Lockwood. It goes back a few more years of course, but the story has never changed. My father told me. My granddaddy Earl told my daddy and my daddy's granddaddy told him, so you can see it has been passed down for years and years from the very few who survived that era. Don't be so quick to dismiss this, son. Just remember if something ever rose out of the ground and tried to bite you, shoot it in the head and make sure you live to tell the story to your own kin."

“So you believe that story then, Pa?”

“Yes, son, I do. You should as well.”

“Tell me another story. I want to hear about the gunfighter and Indians.”

“No more, son. I need my whiskey and your mother will be waiting up for me. It is your time to shut those blue eyes of yours and get some sleep.”

“Yes, Pa.”

Fred leaned down and gave Jesse a kiss on the cheek. Before he tucked him in he ruffled up his bright blonde hair and then blew out the candle. Leaving the door slightly ajar, he retreated to the living room where Karen was waiting with a glass of whiskey for him.

“I wish you wouldn’t tell him such stories.”

“He loves history lessons and I’m giving him history lessons.”

“Yes, but you have no real truth to the stories you tell him. It is all nonsense. You must stop filling his mind with this stuff.” Karen hoisted up her long gown and sat carefully on the two seater wooden couch. Her green eyes watched Fred as he stood by the fireplace in deep thought, his hand rested on the mantle while he held his glass in the other. For a moment she reveled in his muscular form, the way his body moved like a wolf. *Strong and rugged,* she mused.

“It is best to prepare the boy. I do believe what I was told to be true. Who are we to say it isn’t?”

“Is this why you insisted on teaching him to shoot from the age of three?”

“Yes. Now look at how good he is. He never misses a single target. Besides, what if the Indians come? Don’t you want him to be able to protect himself?”

“Of course I do.” Karen knew when to stop. She’d lost the battle before it even turned into one. She slipped off the couch gracefully and stood in front of Fred. Her eyes searched his for a moment before she leaned in and gave him a gentle kiss.

He took her in his arms and cradled her softly. His free hand roamed down her side and over her growing belly. “You think this one will be a girl?” He asked as he rubbed her belly up and down. A large smile swept across his face, making his thick moustache jiggle about. It made Karen giggle.

“I think whatever it is, it is going to be huge. Just look at the size of me,” Karen said as she demonstrated her size with both her hands. Fred

chuckled and emptied his glass. “Don’t be worried about this bump. You are gorgeous no matter what.”

# Ten Years Later 1855

“It sure is dry, ain’t it, Pa?” seventeen year old Jesse declared. He sat on his horse looking south in search of an area that wasn’t caught in the drought.

“We need to find water for the cattle or it’ll be the next lot that dies,” Fred said exasperatedly. He dug his heels into the side of his horse, took the reins firmly, and turned toward the south. The cattle were herded in the same direction, driven by six other men on horses.

Jesse tipped his hat slightly while rubbing the back of his arm across his slick forehead. The heat was burning down hotter than Hell. He shifted on the saddle and caught up with his Pa. His horse was kicking up so much dust and debris into the dry air that Jesse couldn’t see anything through the cloud, but he knew for sure he’d heard howling. He squinted harder to try to look through the dirt, but still couldn’t see anything. A prickling sensation swept over him, and he knew that wailing was trouble. He slowed his horse to a trot and looked intently toward the direction of the baying. Apache warriors seemed to spawn from out of nowhere. They materialized from behind every rock, crawled out of holes, and appeared from the slightest dips in the ground. They raced from every direction, running and howling. Jesse watched in shock as they charged toward them.

“Go, Jesse. Get out of here boy!” Fred screamed as he watched one of the cowboys being pulled from his horse and viciously bludgeoned across the head before being scalped.

A short Indian with a bald head, except for the long lock that protruded from the center of his forehead, was approaching as if he were invisible. He fixed his dark brown eyes, lids covered in war paint right on Fred’s revolver. Fred watched him reach for an arrow and knew if he didn’t shoot him now, he’d be dead. Fred aimed the revolver right at the chest of the Apache. Just as he pulled the trigger the Indian went down, but not by Fred’s gun. He looked over to see that his son hadn’t obeyed. Instead, he was side-saddling with his own revolver, shooting at them all. Fred was amazed at how fast Jesse was with his gun. He didn’t stop shooting. He had already taken out six of them. Then he reloaded his weapon.

Fred’s horse unexpectedly cried out and then fell, pinning Fred under its thick belly. Fred could see multiple arrows sticking out of the side of his horse. H*is favorite horse*. It angered him. He wormed his way out from

underneath it and stood up, using the horse as a shield as he fired back at the savages. Three of Fred's men were already dead, scalped, and laying in thick dark red pools. A fourth man was being held by two Indians while a third brutally scalped him. Their ritual was cut short as each of the Indians fell one by one. Fred watched as his son shot each and every one. It was on this day that Jesse earned the nickname 'Gunslinger.' He had wielded the gun like a forty-five-year-old master, making Fred very proud.

By the time they were finished shooting, the rest of the Indians had run off. The cattle had run north and it would take a full day's work, maybe two, to round them back up. Fred was fuming mad. He'd lost his best men on that cattle drive, and not to the damn drought. Now he had the unfortunate task of informing the families of the deaths of their loved ones. Jesse rode close enough to Fred so that he could jump onto the back of Jesse's horse. Jesse rode straight home without stopping. When there was one Indian attack, another was sure to follow.

Jesse dropped Fred at the stable and turned to leave.

"Son, where are you heading?" Fred called out.

"I'm gonna let the wives know about what happened. You rest and nurse that arm of yours."

"Huh?" Fred mumbled, then looked down at his left arm and noticed a few thin streaks of red. He looked closer and saw the arrow head protruding a fraction of an inch. He almost fainted. He hadn't even felt the arrow go in. He tried to recall it, but couldn't.

"Pa. Papa. Are you OK?" came the sweet voice of his ten year old daughter Mary. She ran right up to him and threw her arms around his neck. He picked her up and kissed her on the cheek.

"I'm just fine, see now." He whirled her high into the air then caught her before placing her down and carrying on toward the house. Karen was waiting at the entrance and her face carried the worry of ten women.

"Hon, it is OK. I am OK."

"Explain that then," Karen said while pointing to his arm.

"It's only a flesh wound. Besides, Mary gets to keep the arrowhead as a souvenir of her Pa's bravery.

Mary squealed loudly with excitement and rushed inside. She grabbed a dining chair and pushed it into the kitchen, then stood on it and opened the cupboard and pulled out the first aid box. She felt hands around her waist and she let off a squeal of delight. "What have I told you about climbing?"

Karen asked as she lowered Mary to the ground. She sparked a gleaming white smile at her mother and took off into the living room with the first aid box tucked under her arm.

"Pa, can I take it out? Can I?"

"I think this is a job for your Ma, but you can watch if you like."

Karen rolled her eyes and moved her hair away from her face as she took a seat next to Fred. She took out the alcohol and poured some onto a cotton swab. "This might sting a little." She applied the swab and both she and Mary watched for Fred to grimace but he didn't. She then found the pair of tweezers and started to fish around inside his flesh for the tip. Once she latched onto it she pulled, twisted, and pulled until was out. Fred watched her wash it over with more alcohol then she passed it to a very eager Mary. When it was in Mary's hands she turned it over and then held it up toward the low light that was streaming from the sun.

"It is amazing, Pa. Thank you." She jumped up and hugged Fred and kissed him on the cheek before rushing off to her little room.

"So are you going to tell me what happened? And where is Jesse?"

"Jesse went to inform the wives..."

"Oh for goodness sake, Fred, you were ambushed weren't you?"

"Afraid so. Damn Indians. I didn't even see them hiding out there. We almost found water too, but looks like we are gonna have to head back out tomorrow and find those damn cows."

"You know I don't like this one bit?"

"I know. You tell me every day." He flicked her a smile while lighting his pipe. Karen stood back and then sat opposite him.

"Did you hear about the railroads coming here, to our town? I think it is great news," she said as she crossed one leg over the other.

"I did love, but you know my feelings about the earth being dug up. Just please remember we have the underground bunker that I spent the last ten years purposely building. If shit hits the fan, you are to take the kids and hunker there for however long necessary."

"Damn it, Fred, you won't let that go, will you?"

"Hell no. Why would I? I mean, I know it's true. It's only a matter of time before things are dug up and we're all gonna be doomed. Mark my words."

"Well, with this here town being miles and miles away from any real civilization, it's about time they built the railroad through. It has been a long

time coming. Lord knows we are one of the last to get it too. So no more of your tall-tales. I'm sure the men at the saloon are tired of them stories too. It isn't like any of it has proven in your favor. I just don't want you to be the laughing stock of this town. After all, Jesse is up for sheriff in one more year. Surely you want that for him?"

"Of course I do. But those stories I tell are real. I'll tone it down with the fellas but I won't tone it down for my family," Fred sternly said as he packed more tobacco into his pipe.

Karen looked at him sideways, then got up and tended to her duties. She knew she wouldn't win this battle, no matter how many years passed. It was an endless debate that he was far too stubborn to shift on. It amused her to a point. Karen made her way into the kitchen and began shelling peas.

"Fred. It's been several hours and Jesse hasn't returned. Maybe you need to go look for him."

"He is probably at the saloon having a few drinks with the other men. If I know Jesse, he'll be rounding up a new lot of volunteers for the cattle drive."

Another two hours slipped by and Jesse arrived home. He stunk of whiskey and was obviously drunk. Karen took one look at him and said nothing. She turned her back and went to her room.

"Pa, I got some of the men to join us, tey be here atat 6 arp."

Fred bellowed out a deep laugh when his son couldn't even speak a proper sentence. "Go on, get ya 'self into bed boy. Best you sleep that off." He stood and watched Jesse unsteadily head to his room. As he did he knocked into the furniture and wall. Fred heard him kick off a single boot and then heard the mattress springs as Jesse fell face-first into his bed.

In the morning, at 6 a.m. sharp, the men showed up. They set off to round up the cattle and to find a water source for them and the town. It took all day to round up the cattle. They herded them back within two miles of Fred's. On the way back they passed the area where a good mile of dirt had been dug up to make way for the rail lines. Fred got off his horse and surveyed the area. The other men headed home, shaking their heads and laughing at Fred. Jesse stayed behind and rode his horse at a trot  a few meters behind his Pa.

"Ya see anything Pa?"

"No. Ain't a lick of anything but dirt. That don't mean nothing, though. We gotta come back in the morning with full light. It's getting dark soon

and your ma will be worried about us.”

# The Earth Breathers

Both Fred and Jesse ripped their revolvers from their holsters at the sound of Indians charging. A crippling stream of high pitched yells filled their ears. Jesse scanned the area, ready for them, and he couldn't comprehend what he witnessed.

"Get back on ya horse, son."

"Pa, what in tarnation is that?"

"What I've been telling ya your whole damned life. Those are the earth breathers. Get on ya horse and lets get out of here now!"

Jesse fumbled for his horse's reins, but managed to get a leg into the stirrup and climb up onto his horse. His horse reared its front legs and neighed loudly before throwing Jesse. It bolted as quickly as it could move.

Fred was quick to maneuver his horse to Jesse and helped him get onto the back. Jesse held onto his father's shirt with one hand and used his free hand to shoot the earth breathers that started to chase after them. From where Jesse sat he could see the remains of the Indians. Although he was happy that those Indians were dead, he was shocked to see that his father's stories were true. He clipped three of the earth breathers in the head, exactly as his father had taught him when he was telling the stories. He shot six more after them. Jesse shot but missed when the horse jumped a dry creek bed filled with bark and rocks. He almost lost his balance. He couldn't grasp the speed of the earth breathers; they were almost running as fast as the horse.

"Go faster."

"Not up to me, son, this damn horse is going as fast as she's ever gone before. It's the earth breathers. They are hungry."

"Yeah, well hungry or not they are gaining on us!"

Fred kicked into the side of his horse and she grunted then sped up her pace a little. They had come to a section of land that was filled with caverns, hillsides, and an empty river that faced a tall cliff. The dust that flung into the air was making it hard for Jesse to see the earth breathers. He pulled up his bandana and covered his mouth and nose in an attempt to lessen the dust.

"I can't see them anymore. I think we outran 'em!"

“Don’t be so sure on that. I’m gonna keep going but I ain’t taking them home to ya Ma and Mary. I’m gonna lead a trail through the damn caverns, then we gonna pick as many off as we can. Then we’ll return to hunt them sonsabitches out in the morning.”

“We gonna need a posse, Pa.”

“And we’ll get one.”

After Fred rode his horse through some crevasses and over some ridges, he backtracked over the range and headed home. He made certain that the earth breathers were not following. When he and Jesse arrived, they told Karen the story. Naturally, she was disbelieving, though part of her was terrified. Fred insisted she and Mary go into the bunker he’d built, and she promised she would when the time called for it. Fred left with Jesse and headed into town. The saloon was filling up fast now that it was sundown, and this pleased Fred. He put a few extra coins on the bar table and bought every man in that saloon a shot of whiskey. It took a fair bit of convincing, but he managed to round up a twenty man posse. With the men and time arranged, he returned home with Jesse.

“Get a good night’s rest boy, for we go to battle in the morning,” Fred said as he lit his pipe. He stood on the porch watching the stars. Karen had settled an over-excited Mary off to sleep and joined Fred on the porch. She handed him a quarter-filled tumbler of whiskey.

“You always know what I need,” he said as he took the glass smiling at Karen.

“Fred.” Karen paused for a moment watching a shooting star. “Are we safe here?”

“It will be much safer when you and Mary get into the bunker.”

Karen knew Fred and especially knew Jesse. She knew they wouldn’t come up with such a lie. It would be uncharacteristic of them both. This put her on edge. She spent all those years doubting Fred and his stories. Now she felt guilty for not believing him. They talked for a long while, and then turned in. Fred couldn’t sleep. He tossed and turned and got up, stepped outside in his long johns and gazed at the stars. Another hour passed and he finally went back to bed. There he found sleep, waking just before sunrise.

“Karen, if you hear anything – and I mean anything – unusual, take Mary and get into the bunker,” Fred said sternly as he kissed her on the cheek and left the house. Karen stood watching her husband and only son

get on their horses and gallop away. She said a silent prayer and then stepped back inside the house.

“What if they aren’t there, Pa?” Jesse called out as they rode side by side. His dark brown Stetson almost fell off in a gust of wind. He righted it while gazing out into the nothingness before them. It was a barren landscape of yellowish dirt, hills, rocks, and cliffs. There were a few cacti that lent their green tint to the countryside, but not many. The heat swirled hotter than the day before, and Jesse kept a lookout for any signs of a water source. At the same time he wondered more about the earth breathers.

“They’ll be there, son.” Fred spoke so causally that it excited Jesse. He’d been waiting his whole life to see these creatures and to be the one that saved the world. He wanted the world to know the true meaning of the ‘Black Death.’

Half a mile from their home they met up with the twenty men from the saloon. They also discovered an extra four had joined. Fred sat atop his horse like a king, and Jesse noticed how thick and white his father’s beard had grown. He watched his Pa slip a thumb into his thick belt buckle and grasp the reins with the other. He sat tall and strong, and Jesse admired that.

When his Pa spoke it was with a confidence, authority, and believability that Jesse hoped he himself portrayed. While he sat atop his own horse he listened intently to the instructions laid out by his Pa. Jesse noticed the other men were doing the same. They all looked to Fred with the same acceptance and respect they gave the sheriff.

“The most important fact is to shoot the sonsofbitches in the head. If you don’t and they bite ya, it’s over. You will be dead! They are fast, so watch yourselves carefully. They are also strong, stronger than the Indians. Keep on your horse and aim for their heads.”

Fred instructed, carefully enunciating ‘head shots.’ He had said it twice and probably would say it a dozen more times mused Jesse. Now with the instructions laid out bluntly, each of the men knew what to do. They headed out. It wasn’t long before they traversed the eight miles and were back at the freshly dug dirt site.

“Let’s split up into two groups,” Fred ordered. Jesse took twelve men and led his group left while Fred led his to the right. It hadn’t been more than ten minutes before Fred’s group caught sight of the earth breathers. Fred noticed that there were, scattered amongst the earth breathers, several

men who were once rail workers as well as what appeared to be a few Indians from the day before.

"Whatever you do, don't let 'em bite ya!" Fred said. He kicked his spurs into his horse and raced ahead, positioning himself on a hill and stopping to take shots at the things charging for him. He got six rounds off and had to reload. He looked over to the other men and watched as each one of them took shots at the earth breathers.

Ernie, a heavy-set fella, sat atop his horse thunderstruck. He couldn't stop staring at the earth breathers. One of them charged up and bit into the horse's leg, which caused the horse to rear upwards and throw Ernie off. The horse bolted, but only made it a few feet before it fell down and wriggled and kicked into a frantic fit. The horse's terrifying neigh spooked the other horses, and soon the men were being thrown from their mounts. The ones that managed to stay on were tossed about like tumbleweed.

Ernie got to his feet just as one of the earth breathers opened its rotten mouth and tried to grab at Ernie's leg. Ernie screamed and tried to run, but he wasn't fast enough. The thing was on him, biting faster than anything Fred had ever been told about. The thing ripped Ernie's jeans off down one leg and chowed down like he was eating broiled rabbit. Fred couldn't get a shot at the earth breather's head; not without shooting Ernie.

"Matt, get Ernie," Fred ordered.

Matt managed to turn his horse and charge at Ernie. He was only ten feet from him when he watched Ernie shake like a hundred rattlesnakes. Then he turned into one of the earth breathers. His skin had changed color instantly. Ernie's lips split wide open and grotesque set of teeth shot up like chipped and rotten tombstones. Ernie's full head of hair fell out in clumps as the shape of his head altered dramatically. Ernie humped over in a slight angle as if his spine reshaped itself. The most terrifying thing for Matt was when he heard Ernie's bones break like log wood being split. Each of his bones seemingly snapped into another shape that transformed Ernie into a hideous monster that looked exactly like all the other earth breathers. Matt halted his horse and got it turned around, only to face an Indian earth breather that ripped him from his saddle in a single heartbeat.

"Damn it, someone save them," Fred yelled while turning his horse around and firing non-stop into the earth breathers' heads. He got another six and was reloading when he was suddenly chased by railroaders. Their teeth chattered in some unearthly way as they raced toward him. He got his

gun loaded with three bullets and took two of them out. The third one kept on coming and crashed right into the side of Fred's horse. The earth breather stumbled slightly, and then made a grab for Fred's boot. The thing caught its hand on Fred's spurs slicing the tips of its fingers off. It didn't even notice.

Fred kicked the thing hard in the face. As it reeled backwards he took off with the remaining three men. Before they'd even reached Jesse's group, they heard the gunfire and horrifying screams. They knew they were having the same battle. Fred galloped faster. The very thought of his son turning into an earth breather rattled his brain like an Indian drum. The other three followed fast behind Fred. They watched in horror as Kevin was dragged off his horse by an earth breather.

Kevin flicked his cigarette at the earth breather, in a fruitless attempt at distracting it so he could bolt. But all it did was bounce off the thing's chest. Kevin's body hit the ground so hard that he felt like he'd been dropped from a cliff. He winced in pain and tried to drag himself away from the earth breather.

In an instant the earth breather had Kevin's lower leg in its mouth and it was pulling viciously. Kevin felt his entire body lift off the ground before being slammed back down. A million things were going through his head. The strongest thought was not seeing his baby being born. The earth breather bit down so hard that it stripped the muscle from Kevin's calf. It quickly gushed blood like a spilled bladder of wine.

The earth breather forced himself on top of Kevin, pinning him to the dry earth and bit at his stomach, chest, and arms. Kevin could feel his skin being peeled up and then sharply torn away. He screamed in agony and bit down so hard on his lip that he split it. Blood travelled down his chin and onto his torn upper chest. He felt something strange happening inside of him. One last flash of his family crossed through his mind before his eyes turned into globs of gray blood. His skin grew ashen first, then pale white with tinges of red where his remaining veins popped to the surface like bubbling pig crackle. The earth breather had gone off after new blood, leaving Kevin to fully transform. His body spasmed in violent fits before he jumped to his feet and went charging after another man named Trev.

"Fall back," ordered Fred

Jesse, Fred, Dale, Joseph, Rick, and Mitchell were the only ones to make it out alive that day. Trev was not fast enough. The transformed Kevin

had torn into him quicker than an eagle on a rabbit.

Fred and the others went directly to Sheriff John Cromps and told him what had happened. He was an older man, hitting fifty-nine, and showing signs of aging with deep wrinkles that bore crater size lines across his forehead and around the corners of his mouth. He sat in his chair, chewing away on his tobacco and double-checking the lot of them. His hand rested on the back of his head as if he were ready to take a siesta.

"John, are ya listening to us?"

John turned and spat into his spittoon, wiped his mouth with the back of his very hairy arm, and looked up at the men.

"So you are tellin' me that them stories you been blabbering on about for years is true, Fred? And you other men are here to back him up?"

The men all spoke at once, making John whistle loudly. The men piped down and let Fred take the lead.

"Listen, John, we'd not be here if it weren't true. We lost several good men today. We gonna lose more as they are coming. They can damn well smell our blood a mile away. We need to set up posts and pick 'em off as they enter the town."

"I'm getting far too old for this pile of dung. I'm hereby announcing Jesse's reign of sheriff from this day forward. You, young man, are in charge of this hear stinking little town. Good luck to ya lot, I'm getting Louise and we're heading well away from this here town. The next town I hit I'll tell 'em for ya, sonny, and get some back up for ya. That's the best I can do," John said, removing his star-shaped sheriff's badge from his shirt and slapping it hard against Jesse's chest. He walked out, got onto his horse, and headed for home.

"Damn coward!" Fred cried.

"What we gonna do now, Fred?" Dale asked as he watched Jesse pin the sheriff's badge to his shirt and take a seat in the sheriff's chair. Dale couldn't help be a little jealous. He'd have liked to have been sheriff and was a little annoyed that it went to a seventeen year old whippersnapper. Being almost fifty, Dale felt the job was his but he had to set his differences aside for now. Once they had the things back in the ground double dead he vowed he'd take the position of town sheriff.

"Let's ask the newest sheriff?" Fred said with enormous pride.

"I say we do just as we planned. Get every man armed and stationed throughout town, barricaded by something strong, and take those damn

earth breathers out the moment they're in range."

"Ya heard the sheriff. Get and organize the other men. Let's meet back here at six sharp," Fred said sternly. He looked over at his son and gave him a wink. Jesse noticed his Pa's white beard shift upwards, and it made him giggle a little inside.

The men left and organized the others. Barricades were set in place. Fred had gone home and put Mary and Karen into the bunker. "I'll be back," he promised. He got back on his horse and headed into town. He went to the saloon first and downed three shots of whiskey, then headed over to the sheriff's and noticed half the town had gathered outside, including some of the women folk.

"What's going on?" Fred asked no one in particular. A man by the name of Iven spoke for the large group.

"We all came to help."

"And the women?"

"Them too," said another man, one that Fred didn't know or recognize. He looked Mexican.

"We gonna set a trap to lure them vermin into town. We hear you left them a few miles away. They won't know where we are for a while, and we want this over with, so Darren and Markus have gone out and they should be back in a couple of hours. I suggest you all get to your posts. It is gonna be a blood bath. Whatever ya do, don't get bit,' Jesse commanded. Fred watched as each of them walked away and did as they were told. It made him even prouder of Jesse than he'd ever been.

"Being sheriff really suits ya. You got it a year earlier, but you are handling it like a real man."

"Thank you, Pa. You come with me, we're holding out here. We're going to use the jail cells as our protection."

"Good call, son." Fred followed Jesse indoors and waited inside the cell. He found it odd looking out through the bars when an idea occurred to him.

"Son, this here cell and the one next door are large enough for several men. I think it best we put more men into the cells. Better protection. We can fire at them sonsabitches as they try biting us through them bars," Fred said while pointing to the bars.

"The women who are gonna be aiding are joining us in half an hour, and ten men are bringing in crates of ammo so we don't run out. Don't worry

Pa, I got it sorted."

"Damn! You really do."

Just as Jesse had said, half an hour had passed and thirteen of the town's women showed up. Some brought rifles, others brought revolvers, and shortly after them the ten men showed up each carrying a crate of ammo. Fred felt a little more relaxed knowing they would all be safe behind the bars. He figured they had enough weapons and ammo to take out a whole country. So he sat in the corner and filled his pipe with tobacco, lit it up, and enjoyed the flavor while he picked at his boot thinking about little Mary and his wife Karen.

# Eastbourne Town Battle

Silence.

Nothing.

Then...

Two men rode into town yelling for everyone to be ready. They raced to the end of the town, got off their horses, and took cover behind the water trough. They aimed their rifles down the middle of town, and it wasn't long before hordes of earth breathers rushed in. Jesse figured there must be at least fifty of them if not more. He made a loud banging noise to get their attention then rushed into the back of the building and into one of the cells. When he was safely behind the bars, everyone inside the cells hollered and banged on the bars to get the attention of the earth breathers. The noise cut like a thousand banshees through the sheriff's building.

Several of the earth breathers rushed into the sheriff's building and headed right for the noise. As soon as they were in clear sight, everyone started shooting. Bullets were hitting the walls above the earth breathers, the floor, and some managed to hit them in their chests, arms, and legs.

"Aim for the heads," Jesse ordered.

A great deal of gunky looking blood sprouted outward, arching up and splattering on the floor like spilled oil.

No one had noticed, but a couple of the women had their hands through the bars to shoot the oncoming earth breathers. Fred, Jesse, and the others were too busy shooting at the ones behind the front row. They shot them in their heads and watched them fall down like tree logs. Fred turned sharply to see one of the women get her hand snatched by one of the earth breathers. He wasn't quick enough to shoot before she'd had two of her fingers bitten off. Screaming, she withdrew her hand after Fred had shot the earth breather in the head.

"Sonofabitch bit my damn fingers off!" she howled, grasping her hand tightly as she tried to stop the wash of blood flowing from the stumps. . Suddenly she fell to the floor and her body jerked. It jolted and jumped about like she was being kicked by an angry horse. Then she sprang to her feet and reached out and grabbed the closest person then took a huge chunk of flesh from his neck. It was like watching a wolf kill a buffalo and bury its head inside, pulling the sinew from it. Tendons from the man's neck stretched outwards into the woman's mouth until they snapped clean away. The man threw an arm to this open throat and gurgled before he too fell to the floor and started convulsing.

“Everyone get out!” Jesse demanded.

He had to scream louder to be heard over the gunfire. Jesse bellowed it again, tugging on their shirts and pulling them to the door. “Get out! We gotta get now!” he said. He opened the door and shot the head of the first earth breather that lunged at him. He was splattered with its blood. Jesse quickly wiped his eyes clear and shot another. Behind him his father was shooting others that were coming from the rear. The two who had transformed inside the cell had managed to turn four more. Fred grabbed a hold of his son and practically dragged him out.

“We can’t leave them,” Jesse protested.

“Damn straight we can, boy. They are all dead.”

Jesse took a quick look over his shoulder and all he could see were bodies being torn apart before turning into those things. He shivered and bolted out the door slamming it shut behind him. He was hoping to bide some time. In the street he had to shield his eyes from the harsh sun that felt like lightning bolts were flashing right in front of his eyes. He squinted; everywhere he looked was a dead body on the ground or they were chasing the town folk.

“Whatcha think, Pa? Outrun ‘em or fight?”

“We gotta fight for the sake of the world, or everyone is gonna die. I got an idea.”

“Whatever it is, Pa, do it faster,” Jesse said while shooting an earth breather as it charged for him. They ducked into the town’s merchant store. Fred hastily jumped over the counter and started pulling out boxes of dynamite.

“Ya gonna blow the whole damn town?”

“If you got a better idea, son, let me know. This is our only chance at surviving.”

Jesse thought hard and couldn’t come up with anything better. He grabbed a box of dynamite.

“So how we gonna do this?”

“Opposite this here building is the barber’s. We gonna lure as many as we can in there, and when we are out from the back door we throw one of these in there. Them sonsabitches can blow to smithereens. When they come running after that I’m gonna throw another at them and so on. You get my drift boy?”

“Got it, Pa.”

Fred stuffed three dynamite bars into the left side of his jeans. He used his belt buckle to hold them in place, and then did the same on the right side. He put another ten inside of his shirt and let them fall around his belly. He took another bunch and used his boot to hold two each and then he held two in one

hand. With the other hand he lit a cigar. He gave one to Jesse and had him do the same. Jesse coughed and spittle shot from his mouth.

"Quiet boy!"

Jesse held his mouth shut with his hand and coughed into it. Fred had a look out the window once Jesses' coughing subsided. He couldn't see much from his particular angle. He tried to peer on the side, but still couldn't see anything. He puffed on the cigar and bravely opened the merchant's door and poked his head out. It was clear so he stepped out onto the porch. His boots clip-clopped on the wooden floor so he stood still and held his breath. The noise from multiple gun fire was pulling the earth breathers further down the center of town. Both Fred and Jesse stood in the middle of the town and on Fred's signal they made noise, and lots of it. They hollered and yahooed until they got the attention of the earth breathers.

"Soon as they are a few feet from us, run into the barber shop and out the other side. You hear me boy?"

"Got it, Pa."

When the earth breathers were a few feet from them, they ran inside the barber shop and headed straight out the other side. They watched carefully as seven of those things entered in a rush, heading straight for them.

"Come on, Pa, light it!"

"Just wait a few more seconds, son."

"Now, Pa. NOW!"

When no more earth breathers entered, Fred used his cigar and lit a stick of dynamite. He threw it into the opening of the window. A few seconds passed before it exploded. It took all seven earth breathers with it. Before Fred and Jesse got excited, they raced back into the middle of town and watched as more headed their way.

"Now what?"

"Just throw ya dynamite stick at them bastard rotting corpses and blow 'em bitches to hell."

Jesse used the cigar to light two dynamite sticks and threw them hard and far enough to blow three earth breathers up. While he did that, his father shot at the others giving Jesse enough time to hurl another two sticks out. Each time they blew the earth breathers into spectacularly tiny bits, like dead rats splattering around the middle of town coloring up the street in dark crude oily coloring.

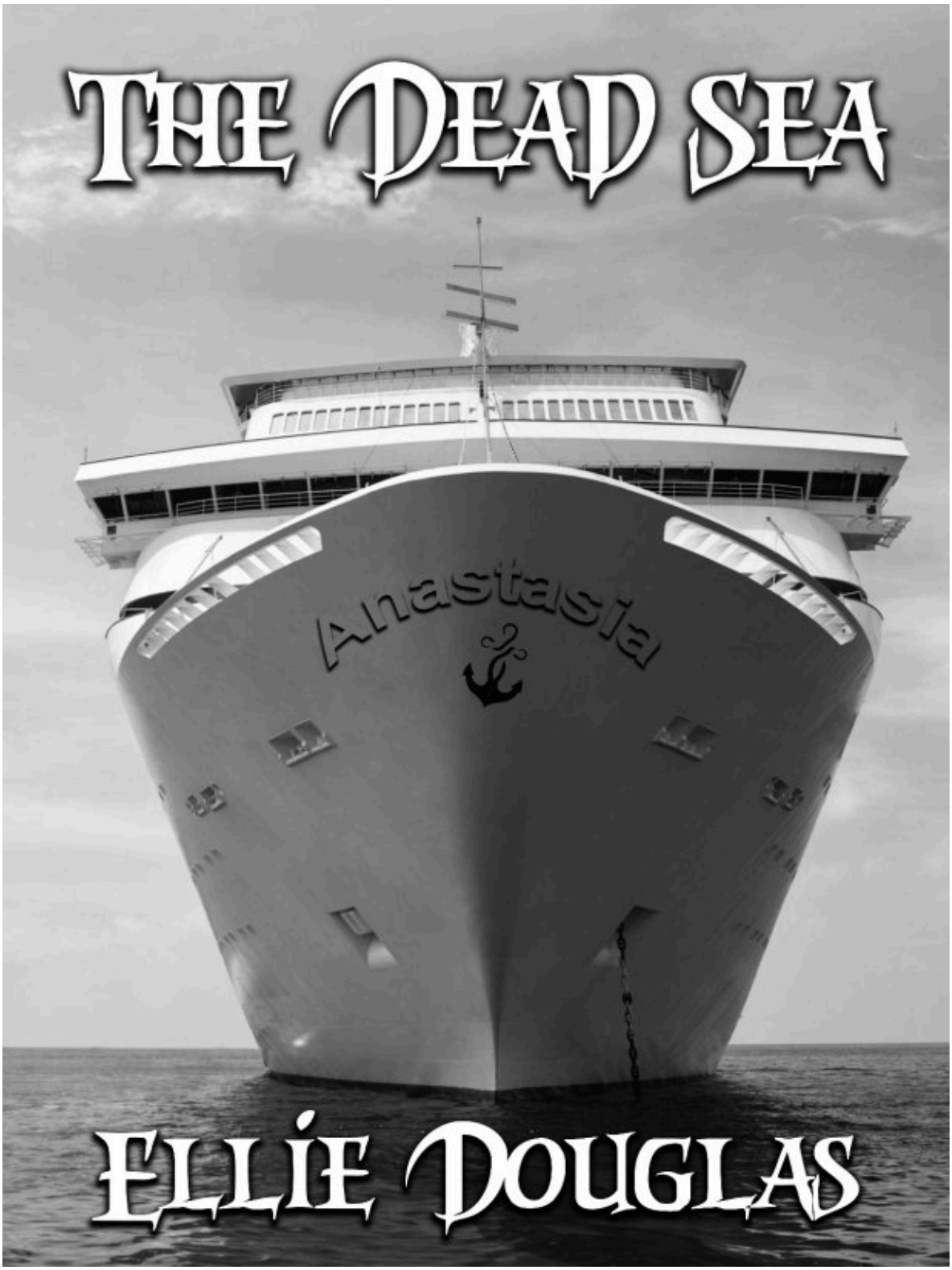
The other townsfolk started to emerge from their barricaded posts and began to shoot at the ones gunning for Fred and Jesse. The earth breathers were trapped between them and it wasn't long before they had killed all of them.

They had lost eighty-two town folk that day and two buildings. It wasn't over. Fred knew it'd never be over not while there were other bodies buried out there spread all over and the location of those bodies remained unknown. With the railroads being built and more towns going up, it would only be a matter of time before more showed up.

Jesse trained hard every day and recruited a deputy named Hector Hemmings. Hector and Jesse rode out to the railroading areas and dynamited the sites, making sure nothing under the earth ever climbed back out. But forty miles away in a town called Milton they were being overrun by earth breathers. They took over the entire town of three hundred, and soon those would find more and more towns while making their inevitable way to Eastbourne.

The end.

# The Dead Sea




Ellie Douglas

# THE DEAD SEA

# Chapter 1: Planning

“Come on Billy. It isn’t funny to be joking around like this.”

“I’m serious, Lauren, just look at this. I just won us a fourteen day Mediterranean roundtrip from London to Spain; then to Rome, Florence, and Genoa, Italy, then to France and then back here to Southampton.”

Billy scooted closer to Lauren and showed her the congratulations email.

“For fucking real? We really did win?” Lauren’s eyes were wide with excitement.

“Yes, babe, we did. This is going to be amazing,” Billy chuffed.

“Wait, what about George?” Lauren’s wide eyes slanted and a worried look spread across her pretty face, giving her worry lines that Billy hadn’t seen before.

“Georgie is eight months old now. We can take him. Besides, a cruise as big as this one will have all the amenities and carers that we could ever dream of. We get to have a holiday. A holiday, babe! Think about it; lazing around the pool, or hell, just taking a nap without having to worry about Georgie.”

“Oh, Billy, it sure does sound good. When do we have to go by? And what about your job?” The enthusiasm filtered back through and Lauren’s concerns were diminishing.

“Work will be fine. They will pull in Jack for the two weeks we’re away.”

“Oh my God! Two weeks. Oh my! Were really going? Wow! I’ve not been on a holiday, let alone a cruise, for the longest of times. This is going to be great.” Lauren gave Billy a firm kiss and then picked up her phone.

“Who are you calling?”

“Mum. I have to tell her the good news.”

Billy smiled at his wife, took George from her, and gave him a big cuddle. He then kissed his cheek and played peek-a-boo with him, making him giggle. Billy could hear the exhilaration in Lauren’s voice as she told her mother about the cruise.

“Honey, what is the name of the cruise we’re going on? Mum wants to know.”

“Anastasia. Let her know we’re leaving a week from today.”

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By day six Billy made sure he had his smart phone with him at all times, having learned quickly just how much his wife loved the cruise's boutiques and day spas. He'd wait for her text or call and arrange a meeting place after she'd finished with whatever daily activity she was doing. He loved watching Lauren's face as she'd book herself in for the day and enjoyed taking her to a new show every evening. Today she would be pampered at the day spa. Billy and Lauren got George settled into the day care and then Billy walked Lauren to the third deck.

Billy giggled lovingly as he kissed Lauren sweetly on her forehead. While she was getting covered in the finest mud packs Billy had made his way back to their cabin and picked up the daily newsletter to see what show was on that evening. Dipper the Talking and Singing Parrot was to be the opening for the adult comedy show with comedian Bruce Funko.

Billy thought it sounded great and he knew that Lauren would be ecstatic to see a talking parrot. He locked up the cabin and walked around the top deck of the ship and took in all the sights. There was plenty to see and do: rock climbing, a zip line, three large pools, five bars including a restaurant, and he was surprised to see a band playing so early in the morning.

Billy grabbed himself a juice and charged it to his room and then sat down to watch the band. After they finished playing, Jimmy Collins appeared with his talking parrot and was walking around the deck attracting all the kids and adults. Billy thought the parrot was speaking as well as a human, and he too became immersed in the buzz of it all. He stood up and made his way through the crowd until he was right up front and a hand shake away from meeting Jimmy Collins.

Billy's face erupted into a full-on smile as he watched and listened to Dipper. Had he not seen it with his own eyes he'd have thought he was listening to a teenager. The cockatoo was large with bright white feathers with a touch of yellow that was hidden underneath its neckline. The top of its head spiked tips of yellow throughout its feathers making it look like a miniature Mohawk. Dipper squawked suddenly, and the crowd gasped.

"What's wrong with Dipper?" Billy asked Jimmy, but Jimmy was so startled by the sudden aggression in Dipper that he couldn't answer. Jimmy was stunned when Dipper turned around and bit him hard on the tip of his

nose. It drew blood. The parrot then dug its talons into Jimmy's arm, then released him and took flight, but it didn't go far. It landed on a nearby counter of the Jamaican lounge bar. It knocked over a few bowls of peanuts and one shot glass, squawking loudly while swearing and startling the barman when it pecked him on the back of his hand.

Jimmy rushed through the crowd and made a grab for Dipper, but he continued to squawk before saying 'fuck you' and taking flight again. He lost a few feathers as he hit the pole near the swimming pool. He then flew right into the zip line and attacked the child who was sliding down. Blood erupted out of the boy's neck, rushing out like chemicals sprayed by a crop duster as he continued his descent. Passengers underneath screamed and ran for cover as the blood rained down from above.

Jimmy was yelling at Dipper to stop, but nothing he said mattered. The bird continued his course and attacked several people until one of the porters swung a serving tray at him as he made a dive for him. Dipper made contact with the serving tray, and all that could be heard was a loud squawk before he went tumbling down. He landed on top of a young woman's legs as she tried to sun herself on one of the pool's deck chairs. The woman jumped up screaming and Dipper toppled from her lap to the ground.

Jimmy rushed to his immobile bird. He noticed its beak was now turned slightly inwards, but after more checking he discovered it wasn't broken. Even while the bird was knocked out its beak sprang back into a straight position. He glared harshly at the porter, then swiftly took off with his bird clutched to his chest. He made it to one set of elevators and rushed inside. The doors closed behind him. No sooner had he pushed the button to go down two levels did Dipper wake up and start screeching and flying inside the elevator.

Jimmy was astounded with the bird's behaviour and he grew more upset the longer he failed to control the bird he'd had for the past eight years. Feathers were flying everywhere and the squawks Dipper made inside that small space deafened Jimmy. He held his hands to his ears. The next thing he knew he was defending himself from his own bird. Dipper rushed at him, pecking at him, and stabbing him with his claws.

Jimmy flung his hands out in an attempt to catch Dipper, but it was futile. The bird was acting like a rabid dog. It would swoop upwards and dive down, making contact with its sharp beak all over Jimmy's body. Jimmy tried to shield himself but his hands were so cut up and bloodied that

it was pointless. Jimmy made the mistake of looking at his wounded hands when suddenly Dipper swooped in. Using his powerful beak, he pecked Jimmy's left eye until it turned into mashed pulp and nothing was left but a gaping black bloodied hole.

Dipper used his beak to bludgeon Jimmy furiously. In a matter of forty seconds Jimmy's body was so battered and lacerated that he looked like the tail end of a kite. Ribbons of his flesh flapped about with his movements. His left eye was gone and his nose was half-eaten. Jimmy's cheeks and lips were torn and split showing gum and teeth that were covered in his dark red blood.

The elevator stopped. As soon as the doors opened Dipper flew out and attacked an old man that was waiting there. The old man had no chance to move out of the way. In an attempt to save himself he swung his walking stick at the bird but missed every time. Dipper viciously hammered his beak and used his claws to rip tendons and muscle from the aging man's body. "Fuck, Fuck, Fuck," Dipper scolded then screeched and squawked while degloving the old man's head and powerfully pecking through the old man's skull as easily as cracking a hard boiled egg.

The old man was already dead by the time security arrived. Dipper had scratched, clawed and pecked a few others who had made their way to the elevators. He squawked and flew madly around, screeching obesities and losing even more feathers. His once gleaming white plumage was now a shade of dark pink with intermittent bald patches.

One of the security men ducked out of the way as Dipper made a nose dive for him. The other security man punched Dipper hard in the side of his head. Dipper made an unearthly screech then angrily went after the one that punched him. He opened his beak wide. Just as he was about to bite the security man, another guard whacked him solidly with the old man's walking stick. Dipper was knocked back and hit the wall hard enough to leave a bloodied imprint. The blonde security man took no chances and stomped on the bird's head so zealously that one of its eyes popped outward and its beak flattened with the carpet. Dark red ooze dribbled out and underneath the dead bird.

Onlookers gasped and some pointed at the security man telling him he was evil. Others who had witnessed what the bird had done were praising the security man. Both of the security men quickly bagged up the bird and ordered the floor closed while they cleaned up the dead bodies and directed

the injured to medical on deck one. The cruise ship wasn't equipped to handle dead bodies. Forty-six-year old Captain Nevil McMann had them taken into the storage area and kept on ice. He believed that the ice would keep the bodies from smelling and rotting before they made their next port stop in Spain.

After Billy checked on George, he texted Lauren and told her to meet him on deck B when she was finished. On the way to Deck B he passed the entertainment area and saw the big poster announcing that night's show had been cancelled. Billy was pretty shaken up over what he'd seen and he wondered why the bird had gone crazy. There was so much talk about it throughout the ship that it had spread like Chinese whispers.

Billy was just finishing his second beer when Lauren made her entrance, her eyes scanning the deck for him. Billy watched her and couldn't believe how lucky he was. She wore a black skimpy bikini underneath a flowing yellow sundress that hid nothing. He watched as a multitude of men turned their heads and eyeballed her. He was waiting on the wolf-whistling to start and he snickered to himself with a great sense of pride that he was married to her. He stood up and waved her down and she wandered over to him casually with a bright smile that showed off her perfect white teeth. Her green eyes caught the sun and glistened like emeralds.

"Damn, you look amazing sweetie," he said while leaning in and hugging her firmly. He gave her bottom a tight squeeze while kissing her forehead and then kissing her moist, rosy lips.

"You are too much," Lauren replied, feeling a little embarrassed by the many eyes that were watching her.

"Babe, did you hear about the bird?" Billy asked as he handed her a drink he'd already ordered.

"God, you know me so well. Thanks for the Shirley Temple. Yes, I did hear about it. What actually happened? Did you see?" Lauren sipped her drink and ran her tongue across her top lip seductively. Billy moved closer and slid his arm around her waist and filled her in on what he'd seen.

Lauren shrugged her smooth tanned shoulders and looked around at the sparkling pool. She instantly forgot about what Billy and the others were saying. She gave him a fleeting look, then stood up and removed her sundress before walking right into the pool and submerging herself like a goddess.

“Billy, come on! We’re wasting valuable relaxation time just standing around talking.” Her eyes twinkled in the sun and he could only stand there like a teenager with a severe crush. He watched his wife dunk herself under the water and throw her hair back as she rose to the top. Her brown hair caught the light and shone flecks of gold like crystals. Billy snapped out of his trance, removed his tee shirt, and walked into the pool. He grabbed Lauren around the waist and swirled her until she was so dizzy her eyes swung back and forth like a pendulum.

“God, I love you,” Billy said with a kiss to her forehead and then on her perfect plump lips. Lauren kissed him back, and then splashed him and swam away. He made chase, and when he caught her he gave her another kiss. Both of them knew they were being watched and neither of them cared.

“God, I could screw you right here,” Billy said shifting his weight so Lauren sat across his lap while he had his back against the pool’s wall. Lauren leaned in and pressed her firm breasts into his chest as she whispered in his ear, “Then let’s get back to the room before the day care ends and do it.” Billy said nothing; he just kissed her passionately and together they left the pool. Billy handed her a towel and he wrapped one around his waist. He picked up his tee shirt and her sundress and they walked quickly  back to their cabin.

# Chapter 2: Changes

“Your stomach sounds like a car backfiring,” Lauren said while giggling as she dressed into a pair of white frayed shorts and a purple tank top.

“I didn’t get to eat lunch, and now it’s past dinner. I can’t believe it’s after 7 p.m. We’ve been busy a while.” Billy paused and gave Lauren a sultry look before he carried on talking. “I’m proper hungry,” he said while rubbing his grumbling stomach.

“Well then, let’s get something to eat. I’m famished.”

“Who are you texting now?”

“Mum. I had to tell her about what happened.”

“I’d have thought you’d be posting it all over Facebook and Instagram by now,” Billy said jokingly.

“I did that when you took your shower.” She laughed hard and Billy joined her.

They each took their cabin key cards and left. Billy held his right arm around her waist as they walked the long corridor toward the elevators.

“I want to check on Georgie first,” Lauren said as she pushed the button up for the elevator.

“Good, because I do as well. I love having this break from him but that little guy gets me with his smiles all the time. I’ve missed seeing his chubby cheeks light up.”

In the day care room the three women supervisors were all busy with the ten kids in their care. George was having a snack when they walked in, and he put his cheesy hands up in the air when he saw Lauren and Billy walking toward him.

“Who’s a messy boy then?” Lauren cooed as she scooped him up and gave him kisses on each cheek. Billy leaned in and played peek-a-boo and then kissed his cheeks as Lauren handed him George for a big cuddle. Billy put George back down and let him carry on eating his cheese and crackers. He looked around the room and saw three other kids having snacks while the others were playing some kind of fort game. Chairs had been pushed into the middle of the room and a large blanket had been placed over the top. He could hear them squealing with delight and it brought a big smile to his face. He started thinking about all the cool stuff he’d do with George that he hadn’t heard Lauren.

“Sorry love, was just thinking about building a fort with George when we get home.”

“I was thinking the same thing. Shall we head out before your loud stomach erupts and everyone thinks a volcano just exploded and caused a tsunami?” Lauren laughed out loud. She got on her knees and gave George another kiss goodbye. Once he started eating his cracker they left. They knew he’d not scream and cry for them with food in his hands.

“You know I feel like curry. I saw a restaurant on deck C that has that. Sound good to you, babe?”

“Sounds proper good,” Lauren excitedly said as she slipped her arm around Billy’s waist. They headed to the restaurant.

Not long after they both finished eating and were sipping coffee did Billy notice a man slouched over a table in front of him. Billy looked harder and Lauren followed his gaze. She turned back around to face Billy.

“I guess he’s had too much to drink,” Lauren remarked.

“Dunno babe, something about his slouch isn’t right, he don’t look proper drunk. He looks ill. Didn’t you notice the wound across his hand? Looks like something bit him. And if you look where his face is it looks like dried blood underneath.”

Lauren turned around again and looked at the man’s hands. This time she saw it. His hands were pale, almost as white as the linen cloth covering the table, and there was a red coloured liquid directly in front of the man spilled across the linen cloth. She thought it was tomato sauce at first.

“Looks like blood,” Lauren spoke before turning around. When she got no reply she turned back to look at Billy, but he had already gotten up and was heading toward the man. She quickly got up and followed.

Just as Billy went to touch the man on the shoulders he bolted upright and immediately Billy and Lauren saw the raging anger across the man’s face. His nose looked as though he bashed it in himself. It was caked in dried blood, and the evidence was all over the linen cloth. Lauren and Billy cautiously stood back a bit while intently watching the man.

“Jesus. What the hell is wrong with that man? His teeth are bared and he is snarling.” Lauren kept her voice low and urged Billy to leave with a tug of his hand.

Billy couldn’t take his eyes from the man’s, and he noticed the guy’s expression was exactly the same as the bird’s before it went full on bat crazy. Directly in front of his table was a family, and the little girl – no older

than six – was arguing with her parents over a drink. She wanted another pink panther drink and her parents were telling her that she'd had enough.

Out of nowhere the man with the bloodied nose pushed his table over and made a lunge for the little girl. He latched onto her and bit hard into her neck. Her parents were screaming at the man to stop. Her father tried to get him off of his daughter but wound up being elbowed in the jaw before falling backwards. Her protective mother became vicious and pulled at the man's hair so hard that he stopped biting the little girl and sank his teeth into the mother's left cheek.

Immediately her hands gripped hold of his head and she tried to pull him off. The father staggered to his feet and, with adrenalin flooding him, kicked the guy's feet right out from under him. He fell but took no more than a second to get back up. He screeched like a baboon before attacking the father, biting and clawing at him. The little girl screamed for her daddy. Her mother grabbed her and they scampered backwards afraid of the man.

"Someone stop him!" the mother cried.

Billy and Lauren were too shocked and knew that they couldn't help without being hurt or worse, so Billy grabbed Lauren's hand and rushed her out of the restaurant. She didn't protest. "Get George...we gotta get George," she screamed. As they were running down the long corridor heading toward the elevators they noticed the carnage that was unfolding. People were biting one another, fighting one another, and running in every direction. Billy's mind travelled back to the bird and he tried to connect the bird to what he was witnessing.

"What is wrong with you ,Billy?"

"Sorry love, I can't get the chaos out of my head. I'm too fucking analytical. You know me. I need answers."

"Fuck the answers. We have to get George now!"

"Yes! Don't bother with the elevator, let's take the stairs," Billy suggested while turning to run up the stairs, but people were rushing down and a couple on the landing were biting each other. Blood had splattered across the wall in a jiggered arch covering the poster advertising the ship's many attractions.

"Damn it. We can't go up the stairs." Lauren panicked and looked at the elevator doors. They opened and she grabbed Billy and rushed inside, repeatedly pressing the button to close the door. Just as they did a mad woman poked her head through. She was snapping her mouth open and

shut, and the doors shut on her head. Then they opened wide again. Billy kicked her in the stomach and she went reeling back, allowing the doors to fully close.

"What the fuck is going on?" Lauren screamed while pressing the button.

Billy took her into his arms but she shrugged him off aggressively. "Don't fucking touch me Billy, this is not the time for hugs. I want George, you hear me? I want my son." Billy didn't know what to do. He'd never seen Lauren act that way before and he was taken aback. He wanted to tell her that it'd all be all right, but he knew he'd be stretching it when he himself didn't even know. The elevator arrived and they both stepped out cautiously. On the deck they could hear multiple screams. Lauren's panic returned tenfold.

Eager to get to the day care room she raced ahead of Billy,.

As soon as they got there the panic really set in. They first noticed the blood spray along the window of the door. They looked at each other with fearful eyes then Billy pushed in front of Lauren and opened the door. To their surprise George was in the arms of one of the care givers. He was smiling happily and cooing away.

"I'll take him now," Lauren said holding out her hands towards George.

The care giver didn't hand George over at first. Instead she looked around the room in a panic and Lauren and Billy followed her eyes. They wished they hadn't. To the left were two of the ten kids lying face down in pools of blood. The other kids were crying and screaming or already half dead with bites taken out of their flesh so severely that one child looked like stripped beef. Billy looked around for the other care givers and then he spotted the bathroom door. He looked at the door sharply and then at the woman holding his child. She'd jammed a chair under the door handle and reinforced that with a book shelf. She nodded her head and he felt a little safer knowing the other two that had turned into God only knows what were locked in the bathroom.

"I couldn't save them all," the care giver cried as she handed George to Lauren. Lauren smothered George with tender kisses and then looked toward the door as bloody hands began pounding on it.

"They chased a couple of kids into the bathroom. I barricaded the door. I don't know what to do. What if they come out?" Kelly, the caregiver, spoke so low that she could barely be heard over the screaming kids.

“Billy, what are we going to do? Billy? Fucking hell. Billy!”

“Sorry love, I’m thinking.”

“Think fucking harder for God’s sake. Get us out of here.”

Billy unintentionally rolled his eyes and looked at the door, then back around the room. Kelly was now gathering up the other surviving children and trying to calm them down. Billy noticed the kitchen and rushed in. He pulled the drawers open and tossed things to the ground in search of a weapon. Tucked behind some jars of rice he found what he was looking for: a knife. It was only a bread knife, but it was sharp enough to do damage. He grabbed it and looked around for anything else that could be used as a weapon. He spied some scissors and picked them up. He handed them to Lauren.

“What’s the plan, Billy?”

“Don’t proper know. I just know I want to get you guys out of here. You too, Miss.”

“It’s Kelly. And yes please, take me with you,” Kelly said while she gently took hold of the hands of two of the children who weren’t too badly attacked. They could walk, and though one was bleeding from a scratch across his shoulder, both of them were in better shape than the others.

“I want my mummy,” cried the little girl.

Kelly embraced her and told her a lie. “We are going to get mummy now, Gemma. How about you, Ben? Do you want to go find your mummy too?”

Ben and Gemma said yes at the same time. Tears streaked down their faces. Ben was five and Gemma was three. Kelly handed them each a chocolate chip cookie and took their hands again. She looked to Billy and waited for him to decide on what they were doing.

# Chapter 3: Seven Hours Earlier

The medical bay was filled with patients, and some had to wait outside in the corridor. Doctor Pascal talked on the phone with another doctor from the mainland.

"I have notified the CDC and they are being flown to your next docking location in Spain," Doctor Margaret Simpson said emphatically.

"So this is happening in London as we speak?"

"Yes. A breakout happened seventy-two-hours ago at the London Zoo. Several of the birds got out and attacked multiple people before they were shot down. Look, I shouldn't be telling you this, but as you are my friend I want to warn you."

"Warn me?"

"Yes. London zoo had imported bird seeds from Australia."

"And?"

"Lou, please be patient with me. Let me explain."

"OK, I'm sorry, Margaret, there is so much going on here. I can't lie, I'm very concerned."

"I can imagine you would be, and given the circumstances, you should be. The seeds that were imported from Australia were infected, unbeknownst to the horticultural checks at the time of their arrival. Because of this hibernation period they passed inspection and the usual quarantine time frame. During this time, however, the seeds matured and developed into the strain. So far they have determined that the Australian Flying Fox Bat infected the seeds when they were harvested. The CDC is working hard at narrowing the disease down even further, but speculation about is rife."

"Like what, Margaret?"

"The current consensus is that the seeds had a parasite within the husk. After a period of time it matured into the actual pod part of the seed."

"What exactly are we talking about here, Margaret? What kind of parasite?"

"That is just it, Lou. No one has said definitively what kind of parasite, other than it clearly came from the already infected Australian Flying Fox Bat.

"What were the bats infected with?"

"ABLV. Australian Bat Lyssavirus."

“Hell!” Lou spoke too loudly and one of the patients flicked her eyes at him, staring blankly before bending her head forward and holding tightly onto her arm that had been bitten by Dipper.

“However, the latest report that I’m looking at is that the ABLV was altered. It goes on to say that the sequence of cell structures has changed dramatically. The worst, Lou, is that whoever contracts the virus will die but reanimate quickly, so decomposition never actually starts.

“Christ!”

“There is more.”

“Hell! Margaret, you are killing me here.”

“The Australian bat carries the lyssavirus that can be spread to humans by the saliva of the infected bats through mucous membranes or broken skin, or through bites or scratches. The infection with ABLV causes a rabies-like disease in humans that has proven fatal. Now mix this virus with the added unknown DNA of that parasite and you have a catastrophic, deadly virus on your hands. The infected humans become enraged and can only seek to attack. They want to bite and to forcefully eviscerate you. The CDC is working on the unknown strain. Until a cure can be made, you must quarantine the infected.”

“Jesus, you mean those who come into contact with this are going to act like raging lunatics and start attacking people?” Lou had slipped into the corridor and had walked to the other end, well away from the sick passengers so he could talk more freely with Margaret.

“That is exactly what I’m saying.”

“Do you know what the time frame is?”

“Yes. From our studies it appears that a bitten or scratched victim will turn in a matter of hours. Some as little as three hours, and some as long as twelve. The thing is, we don’t know how fast the virus is maturing, but it seems to be at an alarming rate, and that means it is constantly changing. This is why the CDC hasn’t been successful in figuring out what it is or how to stop it.”

“I have to notify the captain. Thank you, Margaret. Keep in touch please. If there are any more changes I want to hear about it.”

“Will do, Lou. Bye for now.”

The phone went dead and Lou placed it back into his pocket. He rushed back to the clinic and informed his three nurses to continue treating the patients.

“I need to see the Captain about something,” he said and rushed off.

Lou was almost out of breath when he reached the bridge room. He stepped inside and looked out at the vast sea. It was smooth like glass. His attention turned quickly and he walked up to the Captain and in a low whisper asked him to speak in private. The Captain put Mark and Spencer on officer of the watch duty and then he walked Lou into the little room beneath the bridge.

“What’s on your mind, Lou? You look absolutely wrecked.”

“We have a severe situation on our hands, medically speaking.”

“I know of the bird attack, Lou. That isn’t exactly life threatening. I have it under control. The two bodies are in the storage area on ice.”

“I wish it was as simple as two dead bodies, Captain. But it is far more serious. The bird was carrying a virus, and the bitten victims are going to be infected.”

“What does the infection do? Please tell me they aren’t going to die, too,” the Captain said. He looked intently at Lou, waiting for his answer.

“That’s the thing. They do die. But...Jesus...they come back to life and are full of rage. I’ve been on the phone to Doctor Margaret Simpson and she’s arranged for the CDC to meet us at our next port stop.”

“Why?”

“Because this virus is not only contagious through bites and scratches, but it is deadly to the victims. They turn into reanimated rabid-like creatures and they will try to bite anything. Aren’t you listening?”

“Yes, doc I am listening. I’m just having a hard time believing the things you are claiming. Have you seen this happen?”

“Well *no,* I haven’t, but there seems to be a few hours of incubation. We just don’t know how long that is. It could be as little as three or as long as twelve hours. You must get on the radio and have everyone return to their cabins. You must put this ship on lock down now!”

“Lou, my dear fella, you can’t order me to do anything. Remember, I am the Captain. If nothing has happened to the bitten folks then get them into quarantine now. That way they can’t infect anyone else if what you are saying is true.”

“Damn it, Captain, I never thought you’d be one to dismiss something as critical as this. This cruise ship has fifteen hundred people on board, not counting your staff. Do you want everyone’s death on your hands? Do you?”

“Calm down, Lou. I haven’t dismissed what you are claiming. I’m just not willing to put the passengers into a state of panic when we can have it contained. Get those patients who’ve been bitten into a secure room. You can use the storage room, lock it up, and I’ll have two of my staff guard it. We will be reaching Spain in one and a half days’ time. You said the CDC is meeting us there, right?”

“Yes,” Lou grumped.

“Then let them handle it. I do not under any circumstances want to cause undue panic on my ship. Are we clear?”

“Yes, Sir,” Lou reluctantly agreed. As the Captain was showing him out he caught a glimpse of the radio. He wanted to get on it and notify the entire cruise, but he decided that the captain was right and that there wasn’t any sense in alarming the passengers. He antagonized over things as he left and quickly headed back to medical. When he got there he was despondent and frustrated to see that all but three of the bitten patients had already been sent back to their cabins.

He’d have to go through the medical log book, find every one of them, and escort them to the storage room. Having those passengers quarantined wasn’t going to be easy, but he had no choice. He had to do it. He had his nurse take the three remaining patients to the storage room while he and the other two nurses started going through the medical logs.

# Chapter 4: Everyone for Themselves

“OK, get behind me,” Billy ordered. Before he opened the door he looked through its window. The one that was pounding on it earlier had rushed off chasing after another live body, giving them a chance to get out of there.

“Wait, Billy, where are you taking us?” Lauren asked as she moved George from her left hip to her right. The baby bag slipped off her shoulders. Billy grabbed the bag and threw it over his shoulders.

“Billy?”

“Sorry, love. I don’t really know. What about you, Kelly? You work on this ship, you must know of a safe place to head to?”

Kelly tossed her ponytail to the side with a flick of her head. Her hands gripped tighter on the kid’s hands and she began to cry. “I don’t know. I mean anywhere a door is I guess. It looks like those angry people forgot how to open the doors, which I don’t get. I don’t want to get. I just want to go home.”

“Come on, Kelly, think. There has to be somewhere on this ship that is safe, or that has weapons. What about security? Do they carry guns?” He watched Kelly and could see her thinking, recollecting information in her mind. Her dark blue eyes shone with tears as she faced Billy.

“The security team has a station that they operate from. It has monitors of every part of the ship in there. And radios.  Hell, it has it all and it is surrounded by reinforced glass. I think it might even be bullet proof.”

“Great, that’s a start. Now what floor are they on?”

“Um, the same as the Captain’s bridge, only on the opposite side. The port side.”

“You’ve done well, Kelly. We will head there. I won’t lie, looking out this window, it won’t be an easy trip. We have to go up five floors. With kids it will slow us down. When we get to the stairs I’ll carry the boy. Kelly, you carry the girl. We have to move fast and not stop for anything or anyone.”

Lauren and Kelly agreed.

Billy held out the knife. Before opening the door he peered through the blood stained fragments on the window and took a look out. It was clear as far as he could see. He held the door knob tightly and turned it until the door opened. He took a precarious step out and then motioned for the girls

to follow. Billy followed the signs on the wall and headed straight for the stairwell. He saw the chaos ahead and knew he couldn't turn back. Suddenly the hallway was filled with people. The screaming and running were escalating and he feared for Lauren and George. If they got knocked down with the panicked people running in his direction, they would be trampled. He was moving too fast for Kelly, who struggled to get the kids moving at the same pace.

"Please slow down," she called out. But with the noise of screams filling the space Billy hadn't heard her. Kelly's face contorted as she fell down, screaming when a hand knocked her back. The kids ran off in different directions and she was left on her knees yelling blue murder. Other passengers ran past and one even stomped on her outstretched fingers causing her great pain. She reeled her hand in and clutched it to her chest as she tried to stand. She was overpowered by a towering inferno of a man. He stood six foot six inches tall and was foaming at the mouth. Kelly's screams were soon muffled when the goliath took a chunk of her arm into his mouth. He bit down so hard that Kelly could hear her bone snap. Then she watched in horror as he tore the flesh from her body and swallowed it whole.

Everyone was shouting at one another to get out the way and to do something. The screams were so deafening Billy and Lauren had no idea that Kelly was being turned into cat meat. It wasn't until Lauren took a quick glance over her shoulder as they reached the stairwell that she noticed Kelly was no longer with them. She didn't have time to go find her, all she cared about was getting up those stairs, onto the top deck and into the safety of the security room. Billy checked on her and George. When he didn't see Kelly he carried on running up the stairs, clearing the path for Lauren and George.

"How are you doing back there?"

"Good. Keep going. We gotta get to the top deck. Hurry, Billy!" Lauren said without skipping a beat. Billy, on the other hand, was feeling the burn in his lungs and the back of his throat grew dry very quickly. He reached the second landing and had to fight off two old women who were trying to gum him. Both of them had lost their false teeth at some stage and were now attempting to bite. One of them had long nails and she tried to scratch Billy, but suddenly a teenager running between them caught the claws down his face. Billy rushed past with Lauren. George was giggling at all the running, thinking it was a great big game.

When Billy reached the top he made sure it was clear enough for Lauren to get through with the baby. Just as he was facing the big double glass doors that led to the outside deck, a man came smashing through the glass tumbling fast and hard. Billy had to jump backwards. The thing that caused the man to jump through the glass instead of pushing the doors open was coming at him like a runaway train. Billy held out the knife and the man ran right into it. The guy that had gone through the glass was cut badly and tried to take off but his leg was severed at the Achilles tendon and he wasn't going to be walking anytime soon. There was nothing Billy could do for him. He couldn't carry him; he was at least 6' tall and Billy was only 5'7. The one that he stuck the knife in came back for more, and it wasn't until Billy stabbed him in the head that the thing stopped moving. Billy was astounded and frustrated at the same time.

He grabbed hold of Lauren's hand and together they ran across the deck, avoiding others and the biters themselves. Billy was grateful to his mother for having put him through rugby. He had learned how to weave through other players and used that to his advantage now as he zigzagged through everyone while avoiding being bitten. At the end on the left was the sign he'd been searching for: Security. He rushed to the door and tried to open it, but it was locked. He knocked on the door, but no one came. He tried to pry the door open, then stopped and turned to his spooked wife who was yelling at him.

"What the hell do we do now?" she cried.

"The Captain. His bridge room. It's sure to be safe in there." Billy grabbed Lauren again and practically dragged her toward the Captain's bridge. The door was locked and the windows surrounding the circular bridge room were clear enough to see through. Billy knocked on the door over and over. The Captain just stared at them. He didn't want to open the door.

"Come on man, let us the fuck in!" Billy screamed and pounded on the door harder. He stopped suddenly and had to knife the two that were coming at him like raging bulls. He got one in the shoulder and it went down for a few seconds before it was back up and rushing toward Lauren.

Billy stabbed the knife straight into the head of the second one, remembering how the other one he did that too finally stayed dead. When this one did the same, he went after the one that had got within inches of Lauren. She was screaming and Georgie was howling. Billy grabbed the

man's neck and swung him around. As he was turning, Billy thrust the knife through the man's throat and titled it upwards into the man's brain. A geyser of red shot out and hit Billy in the face before the man fell backwards and didn't get up again.

Billy went back to pounding on the door. The Captain, having witnessed Billy's act, was fully satisfied he wasn't one of the things trying to get in to eat him. He quickly had Mark open the door for him. Once it was open Billy practically pushed Lauren inside following her closely he suddenly veered off and madly charged at the Captain.

"You sonofabitch. That's my fucking family you put in danger." Without hesitation Billy punched the Captain hard across the cheek. The Captain stumbled back and looked utterly surprised.

"That's the thanks I get for saving your asses. I ought to throw you back out there."

"We wouldn't have needed saving if you had opened the goddamn door you coward."

Mark had stepped between the Captain and Billy. Spencer stood next to the Captain, ready to punch Billy. Lauren had moved behind her husband and was pulling at him to stop. George was still wailing and it was getting on everyone's nerves.

"I suggest you settle down mister, and keep that baby quiet. We don't need extra attention drawn to us."

Billy uncoiled his fist and took Lauren aside. He took George and distracted him so Lauren could gather herself. She wiped her tears away and tried to stop shaking like a leaf, but the adrenalin that was pumping through her veins disallowed her body to calm. She then focused on George and slowly her body became a little more settled.

"Are either of you hurt?" Came a voice from the other side of the room. A tall slim man appeared carrying two bottles of water.

"No, but I want answers," Billy said as he took a bottle of water.

"My name is Doctor Lou Pascal, and I'll gladly fill you in. Just know that you and your wife and child are safe in here. Those things can't get in."

"At least that is a start. Now start explaining," Billy snapped.

Lauren cast a look of displeasure at Billy and he reeled himself in. His anger was still at the surface, but he reined it in somewhat and awaited the doctor's explanation. When the doctor finished, Billy found his anger centred on the Captain.

“This is your fault you bastard! You could have prevented this if you’d only listened to the doctor. What the fuck is wrong with you?”

“I believed it was in the best interest of my ship to not cause a panic. How was I supposed to know that the bitten were going to turn so quickly? I did tell the doctor to get them into a locked room. If you want to blame someone, blame him.”

“Well is there a goddamned plan at least?”

“Yes. I’ve changed course and we are heading to a smaller island close to Spain. It is our best option. We will make landfall in about forty minutes. I want those things off my ship.”

“Just how are you going to do that?”

“If you aren’t careful I will use you as bait. Shut up and sit down.”

Billy didn’t want to be thrown out of the only safe place. He would keep quiet for now. He went and stood next to Lauren and gave George some tickles.

“Right proper mess we got ourselves in, aye babe?”

“Yeah,” was all Lauren could muster. She was too busy trying to reach her mother after failing to get a hold of her friends.

“I can’t get a hold of anyone, Billy. The signal keeps dying.”

“They will be fine, and we will be fine too.” Billy hugged Lauren and gave George another tickle.

Billy held onto Lauren and together they looked out at the horizon. They were so lost in the beauty of it that both of them nearly forgot about the disaster on board the cruise ship. Lauren leaned in closer and whispered, “I’m never ever going on another cruise ever.” Billy kissed the top of her head and held her tighter. George was cooing softly and pointing at the seagulls that dove down in a mad hunt for a fish. After lingering ten minutes, Billy excused himself and he walked up to the Captain.

“So how’s this gonna work? We dock this ship and then what? Do you have any plan for getting ourselves or those things off the ship? Have you made contact with anyone back home?” Billy eyed the series of dials and buttons on the vast oak panelling.

“Yes, I’ve made contact, and they are sending helicopters to the location we are heading to. The things can stay on here for the navy to deal with. We are getting off this ship when we are close enough to anchor. We have plenty of life boats to get everyone on and out of here.”

“Yes, but without weapons how do you suppose we leave the bridge?”

“The CDC is also joining forces with the navy. They were going to meet us in Spain, but things changed,” the doctor said as he joined in the conversation.

“Well boy, we won’t need weapons as we have our own access to the deck out there. It leads to the gully where a specific lifeboat is held for the Captain and his crew. We will be bypassing those things to get on that,” the Captain said.

“What about the passengers that are still alive and uninfected?” The doctor questioned harshly.

“When the time comes I will get on the radio and tell people to head to those floors and get on a life boat.”

“Simple as that, is it?” Billy huffed.

“What do you suppose I do boy, get out there and escort them to the lifeboats?”

“Well you are the fucking captain. You are supposed to go down with the ship, isn’t that how it is?”

“You have watched way too many movies in your time. It is not how it is. I can’t save everyone on board, there are fifteen hundred passengers and four hundred crew members. It is every man for himself now. This virus is catastrophic. It is highly contagious and I’m not about to risk my fat hairy ass for the likes of a few passengers that may or may not be infected. If you wish to risk the life of your wife and child, by all means go for it.”

Billy couldn’t argue with that. He wasn’t going to put Lauren and George in any more danger. He had no choice but to think of them and ignore the passengers for now.

# Chapter 5: Anchors Down

“Why did you drop anchor so far away from land?” Lauren asked while shifting George from hip to hip.

“We’re too big to get closer. Any closer and we risk damaging the ship,” the Captain replied in a stern but gentle way. He sat in his captain’s chair and toyed with his hat for a minute thinking about what he’d say to the passengers. He picked up the radio and held it close to his lips.

“This is your captain speaking. If there are any survivors that have not been bitten, please make your way to the lifeboats on Deck C. A crew member will be there to guide you to safety. If you cannot make it to the lifeboats please stay in your cabins. You will be safe there. We will send rescue teams for you. Crew, please man your stations. God speed to you all.”

“There better be some crew left to do that job,” the doctor grumbled in a passive-aggressive way.

“I’m with the doctor on this. I hope to God you have uninfected crew to get the passengers off this ship,” Billy said.

Once the ship was securely in place they were told to follow the captain. He led them through the back door to the deck and up a single flight of stairs. The wind had started to pick up as dusk settled in, giving the ocean horizon a spectacular hue of oranges, blues, reds, pinks and greens. Lauren was mesmerized by the beauty and instantly regretted being on the ship. Screams could be heard on the deck below and the closer they got to the railing the louder the screams sounded.

The captain took a cautionary glance over the railing and he watched as two of his crew helped passengers into the lifeboats. He jumped in a start when Mark ordered him to get into the lifeboat. He couldn’t believe he’d been standing there for a good seven minutes, and he’d not even heard Mark. The captain shook his head and stepped into the craft. He took his seat and watched his ship as the lifeboat slowly descended down. They hadn’t gotten past the third deck when a crazed passenger tried to jump for the lifeboat. In doing so they hit the roof of the lifeboat on the way down, causing it to rock. Billy immediately looked at the ropes securing the craft and he felt safe that it wasn’t going to break.

Billy and Lauren watched helplessly as they passed each deck and saw the many passengers being attacked as they tried desperately to get onto a lifeboat. Some were diving into the ocean only to meet their death. Some in the water had survived but three were instantly crushed under the lifeboat as it hit the ocean hard. A passenger had made a dive for the lifeboat but in doing so his body flew

into its hull knocking the lifeboat sideways with a hard jolt. The passenger got caught in the ropes and when he struggled to free himself the ropes were pulled so hard that the lifeboat came free and dropped seven feet.

“Christ sakes, you have to let them in,” Lauren said while she held George tighter. She motioned for Billy to help the two into the raft.

“There is plenty room in here for a dozen more,” Billy hollered when the captain’s hand slapped his hands back from the door. Billy grabbed a hold of the captain and pinned him to the bottom of the boat choking him. “Get off me or I’ll have you thrown overboard,” the captain huffed out. Billy didn’t let go. Instead he tightened his grip around the captain’s throat. Next thing he knew he was hit across the head and he fell sideways. Lauren screamed out and rushed to his side. When she saw that Billy was OK she turned harshly to face Mark.

“What the hell, Mark? That’s my husband, and those people out there need us. Please, we have the room,” Lauren cried.

“They could be infected,” the captain said hoarsely while rubbing his throat.

“If they can talk coherently like they are, they are not fucking infected. Let them on board for Pete’s sake,” Lauren pleaded. She held up her hand to Billy to stop him from attacking Mark. One look at his face and she knew he was ready for a brawl. He had gritted his teeth so tightly that his jaw grew pointy. She had to calm George and Billy down, and it infuriated her. She understood Billy’s anger. If she wasn’t holding George she’d have thumped the captain and Mark herself, but she had to be the rational one. The one to reason with the captain and his lackey.

“All right,” the captain said, waving to Mark and Spencer to help the two on board. Mark reluctantly opened the little hatch door and yanked the two men inside one by one. As soon as they were in the boat one of them lashed out and punched the captain hard to the face, giving him a fat lip. The other cowered away mumbling thank you over and over. A loud splash behind them caught their attention. A group of passengers had jumped overboard trying to get to the other lifeboat.

“I suppose you want me to get that lot too?” Mark hissed.

“If they aren’t infected, then yes,” Lauren replied. She called out to them but she wasn’t heard over the commotion of screams and panicked cries. As they got closer she could tell were infected.

“No. Not them, they are infected,” Lauren yelled. Mark steered the craft away from the group and watched in horror as a lady in the water was bitten. Three other lifeboats made it safely into the water and had all started the journey to the little island. Billy had said no more. Instead he stayed close to Lauren and

George. Occasionally he glared at the captain. When they beached the lifeboats he waited for the captain to get off, then he helped Lauren.

“What now?” Lauren asked while she looked around the beach watching the other boats come in and ensuring that none on board those were infected and she wondered how long it would be before the infected swam to the island. It sent cold shivers down her spine and caused her to get goosebumps.

“We find out if this island has anyone on it and we wait for the choppers to come get us,” the captain said while he walked toward the low bank. At the top of the bank every one of them could see buildings in the distance and it brought them all a sense of relief.

Lauren couldn’t help but smile when she saw the buildings. She turned to Billy and he was smiling too. They strolled up to the first building and noticed the sign above the building was in Spanish.

“Anyone read Spanish?” the Captain asked.

One of the passengers was reading it out loud.

“Beach Front Hotel,” he said pleasantly but with a shaky voice.

No one thanked him. Instead they rushed inside, except Lauren and Billy. They hung back and thanked the passenger for translating and then they headed inside after the others. Inside Standing in the lobby, the captain was already on the phone. When he finished his call, the doctor got on the phone.

“The military has reassured me that rescue choppers are on the way. They are going to pick us up and take us to a quarantine zone back in the UK.

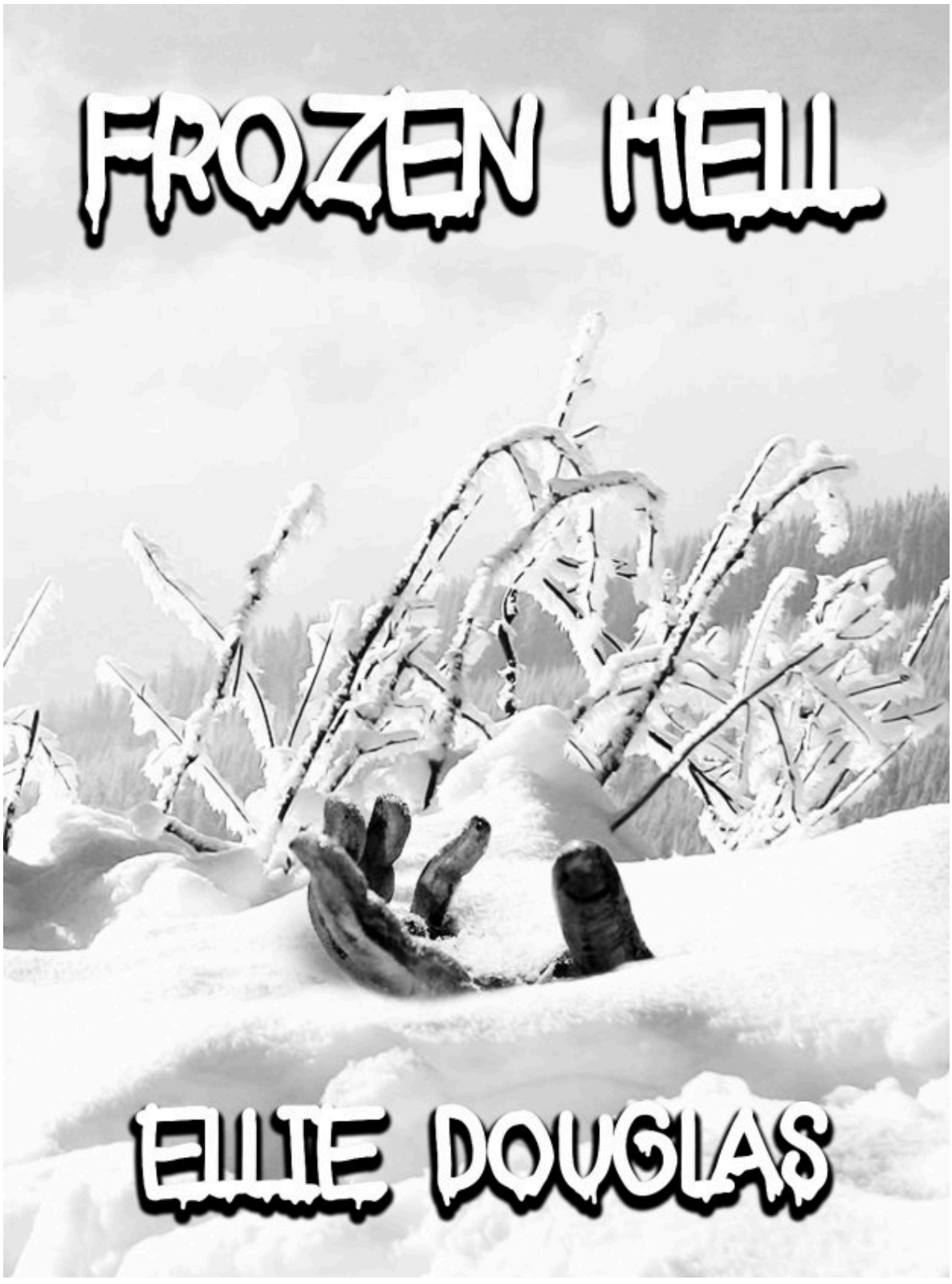
“Great,” said Lauren. She was distracted trying to make contact with her mother.

“I still can’t get through. Billy, what if they are infected?”

“Babe. I highly doubt it. They are either out or have already been evacuated to a quarantine zone. There is no sense worrying about anything more until we get home and see for ourselves. We are safe now my darling. Safe. You, me and baby George.”

The end.

# FROZEN HELL



ELLIE DOUGLAS

# FROZEN HELL

# Alaska 1938

“Snowball Fight!” Yells Dasan and in that moment Chogan knows he has a few seconds to take cover. In the seconds it takes Chogan to duck for cover Dasan is already digging his gloved hands into the snow, frantically making a stockpile of snowball ammunition.

“You’re gonna loose, Dasan!” Chogan taunts from behind a rock.

“Sure, Chogan? Wanna bet?” Dasan calls back taking cover behind a slope but looses his footing and slides down squealing in delight. Chogan grabs a handful of snowballs and heads toward the sloping ridge that his 12-year-old brother just slid from, but he stops part way when he trips over a hidden rock beneath the snow.

“Son of a bitch! I’m gonna get you, Dasan, and when I do I’m not going easy on you!” Chogan yells out with the breathlessness of an aged man.

“You and who’s army, Chogan?”

“Shit! Shit! Shit!” Chogan cries out and his voice carries a fear that Dasan hasn’t heard before.

“Stop playing games, Chogan. If you can’t climb the slope to get me just say so. Don’t try and spook me out!”

“I’m not! It is...I just...Shit!”

Dasan precariously climbs back up the slope wary of his brothers antics. “You better not be messing with me?”

“I swear, little brother, I’m not. Look all the snowballs are down. Just get up here and look at this!”

Dasan climbs the slope just enough for his head to peek over the top and double make sure he isn’t going to be pelted.

“What is that?” Dasan calls out as he uses his hands to pull himself over the slope and head down towards Chogan.

“It is Hector; he’s been missing for five years. I remember father talking about it and the hunt for Hector had gone on for two weeks.”

“Why is he all frozen like that and why isn’t he you know...turned to bones?” Dasan asks as he inspects the frozen block of ice. Hector’s face was almost pressed into the thick block of transparent ice, his eyes were open and it scared Dasan.

“Don’t be scared, little brother. Hector can’t hurt you. But we must get him back to mother and father. The whole village will hold a ceremonial

burial for him once they thaw him from this block of ice." Chogan taps on the solid ice and looks curiously at Hector and at first he believes he has seen a flicker of movement which makes him jump back in a flinch.

"How are we gonna get him back? I mean that thing must weigh more than a polar bear." Dasan points to the ice coffin and frowns heavily.

"Get the dogs and sled and bring father with you."

"You want me to run all the way home like some little pig?"

"Oink. Oink. Be off with you or I'll tell."

"Tell?"

"Yeah, I'll tell Neka that you like her."

Dasan shoves his gloved hand into the snow and pulls out a handful and tosses it right into Chogan's face. "Don't you dare tell." Dasan calls out as he runs south. Chogan doesn't have time to throw snow back, his brother is already vanishing within the whiteness of the snow and another few seconds Chogan cannot even see him. Even his footprints are disappearing and Chogan finds himself mesmerized by the solid ice coffin.

He sits next to it studying it and waits. Forty minutes have gone by when Chogan hears the dogs. He looks up and sees six dogs pulling the sled and his father and brother sitting atop shielding their faces from the harsh bitter winds. The wind howls, piling up snow in drifts, blinding Chogan's vision for a few seconds then as it clears a bit he sees the dogs are even closer. Chogan's breath expels as a pale cloud against the numbing air, he blinks thoughtfully as the frost patiently kisses his face, captivating him with its fierce beauty.

"Chogan." Comes a strong voice through the falling snow.

"Father it is Hector. Look!"

Alo jumps off the sled and slushes his way toward Chogan. His boots make a rhythmical squishy noise against the snow, solid and regular like a soldier. His face is stern and filled with pockets of wrinkles. He swings his gun over his left shoulder and it glistens, the low light catching the metal like a far away fire. His muscular upper-body pushes through the furs covering his tanned skin making him look enormous. Alo reaches down and touches the ice coffin with his gloved hand and casts a look at Chogan.

Dasan pads closer and tosses some fraying rope to the ground. Chogan assumes the dogs are hungry and making it known with their constant barking and whining..

"Dasan, get those dogs to shut up." Chogan orders.

“You aren’t the boss of me.” Dasan sneers, still he obeys and digs out some seal meat from a pouch hanging off the side of the sled. He cuts it up expertly and tosses it to the dogs. Each of them fight for the meat. They will fight for extra. Dasan hates them fighting and often feeds them his share but on this day there is nothing extra. He leaves the dogs and makes his way back over to Chogan.

“You already got the rope around that block of ice? Shit, how long was I feeding the dogs?” Dasan says in astonishment while he backs down and waits by the sled. Alo pulls on the rope and is satisfied it is secure. He gets the dogs to move out with a long whip. Alo thinks about how vicious the dogs are, being half wolf and half dog, and how dangerous but necessary they are to their way of life.

The dogs move out slowly and the ice coffin begins to slide down the slope and over a few bumps.

“Get on the sled, Chogan.” Alo orders, baring his missing teeth as he smiles at Chogan.

Chogan gets on the sled with Dasan while Alo stays back walking. He wants to ensure the ice coffin doesn’t get caught up in rocks along the journey home. Alo uses the whip and calls out to the dogs and they bark a few times as he ensures they keep a slower pace. When they get back home he has the boys fetch their uncle Chase and with his help they push the ice coffin inside the igloo.

Alo, Chase and the boys sit around the solid frozen block talking and smoking. Even twelve-year-old Dasan is smoking.

“We will keep it here until it thaws.” Alo utters through puffs of smoke.

“Agreed. It should be thawed by morning. Keep the fire going.” Chase replies as he gets up to leave.

Aquene starts organizing the bedding for Alo and the boys. She carefully lays down polar bear skins before tending to the whale meat and handing it out. After their meal they all bed down for the night.

Alo stays awake most of the night ensuring the fire doesn’t die. He inspects the coffin many times and he too thinks he is seeing movement from Hector. He gets real close to the ice coffin and taps on it, when nothing happens he lies down and goes to sleep. He wakes to see that the ice has mostly melted and that now he can use his pickaxe to chip away at the rest. With the help of the boys they chip and chisel at the ice until it is all gone. Hector’s body seems to move again. Alo believes he was seeing

things until Dasan jumps back in horror when Hector's eyes shut then open, shut, open, shut, and open five times before he bolts upright and lets out a strangulated growl.

"What the hell! Father, what is that? Is he alive?" Chogan warily asks while taking two steps back and almost tripping on his mother who has just removed the polar bear skins.

"It is either god or the devil." Alo states while looking directly into Hector's milky clouded-over eyes. Hector's beard is starting to crisp up with the cold and his skin goes from tan to pale along with a terrible deathly smell that starts to emit from him.

"Hector."

"Hector, do you recognize me? It is Alo, remember?"

Hector tilts his head slowly to the left and then to the right like a little lost puppy. He is trying to understand the words from Alo but he can't and he feels suddenly hungry as a surge of impulse to eat Alo overtakes him. Hector takes a step forward and sways left and right until he manages to get his balance. Alo lunges forward to help Hector and at that very moment Hector wraps his weak arms around Alo and takes a bite from his shoulder. Alo forces Hector back so hard that he collides with the wall of the igloo and he falls sideways like a drunken derelict. Aquene cuts up some whale meat and throws it at Hector. They each watch as he ravishes it up like a caveman and looks for more. Aquene cuts up more and hurls it at him.

"Guess he was just hungry." Alo says, rubbing at his bitten shoulder. Aquene looks at Alo's shoulder.

"Not broken." She murmurs and tosses more whale meat to Hector.

"Boys go get your uncle and bring more meat too." Alo orders. Dasan and Chogan nod and take off giggling.

"Shell we sled over or run?" Dasan asks.

"Walk. Let them dogs rest. It isn't far." Chogan replies with a smirk to his voice.

"It is a half hour there and half back I think mother wants the meat faster than that."

"Hector has enough whale meat. If he eats all of that then he's just a pig. Come on, little brother, let's go; it's too cold to stand around debating it."

# The return

“Did your father say why he wanted me?” Chase rubs his head and lies back down.

“Nope. Hector... he is alive.”

Chase bolts up right and grabs tighter to his thumping head. “What?”

“Hector is alive!”

“That can’t be. He’s been in that block of ice for at least five years. He can’t be. Are you boys playing some stupid game with me?”

“No, uncle. Father said to get you. Uncle, I swear Hector is alive.”

Chase rubs his temples harder and gets up. Chase pulls on his caribou boots and walks out with the boys. Outside are some of the women villagers back from collecting water. They say hello as they walk by. Dasan is looking hard for Neka but he can’t see her, not until they walk a few more yards and then he catches sight of her. She is wearing one of her mother’s handmade hooded parkas and Dasan can just barely see her face. She looks up and gives a cheeky smile and then giggles as she puts her head down and carries on. Dasan keeps watching her. Looking over his shoulder and falling behind.

“Come on, Dasan.” Chogan calls out. Neka turns briefly and giggles more when she catches Dasan watching her. He turns back around and runs to catch up with Chase and Chogan.

“You know, little brother, I don’t have to tell her anything?”

“What? What does that mean?” Dasan grumbles, feeling the heat rise to his cheeks.

“She already knows you are crushing on her.”

“Shut up! She doesn’t.”

“Your brother is right, Dasan, she knows. She likes you too.” Chase chuckles as he ploughs his boots through the thick snow keeping a fast pace that has the boys running to keep up.

Dasan doesn’t say anymore, his heart putters about like tiny butterflies have been set free inside and all he can think about was Neka’s dark curly hair, the way she smiles and giggles but mostly it was her eyes. The deep dark almost black that take his breath away. He is so distracted by his thoughts of Neka that he trips on an unseen rock and falls face first into the snow. He looks up at his brother laughing at him.

“Don’t laugh at me!” Dasan shouts as he gets himself up and follows slowly behind Chogan and Chase. His thoughts on Neka keeping his anger away and stopping him from picking up a rock and hurling it at Chogan.

Chase hurries into Alo’s igloo and finds Hector leaning over Aquene, but it was what he sees to the right of them that horrifies him enough to make him scream. Alo’s body is lying in a pool of his own blood, it has run onto the polar bear skins that Aquene must have dropped. His body is torn up like he’d been attacked by a walrus, thinks Chase. Upon a closer look he can see Alo’s parka has been stripped and holed. Flesh has been pulled through the holes and ripped away from Alo’s body but it is his skull that has Chase in turmoil. Alo’s head has been skinned and half of his brain is missing. He is almost unrecognizable. Chase is so lost in thought that he doesn’t hear the boys screaming and it is only when Chogan rushes up to his mother that Chase pulls him back swiftly enough to cause him to fall and hit his head on the fire pit.

“Get back. Don’t you see? Hector did this. He’ll do it to you, me and Dasan. Run boys. Run now!”

Chase helps Chogan up and pushes him and Dasan out the door of the igloo but he isn’t fast enough to get himself out. Hector has dropped Aquene’s dead body to the ground and has latched onto Chase’s parka pulling him back so hard that Chase falls, taking Hector with him.

“Get help!” Chase screams at the startled boys who turn to help Chase. “Get...Help!” he yells again. Hector pulls Chase’s body backwards until Chase’s head is resting on Hector’s lap. Hector leans down and bites right over Chase’s right eye. Dark red oozes out as Chase’s legs kick and squirm. Hector bites down again furiously until he sucks Chase’s eye right out of its socket. He uses his arms to pin Chase down and wrap his legs around Chase’s waist to hold him as still as he can while he eats Chase’s other eye.

Chase’s blood, that once flowed thick and scarlet through his veins, is now flowing like lava down his face. He bucks and cries out but Hector is too strong. Unbelievably strong. Chase feels like he has a muskox sitting across his chest.

Hector bends forward again, this time biting away at Chase’s nose leaving a gaping hole. His smooth skin is being torn and ripped away leaving a bloody mess that carries the smell of an abattoir. Hector’s razor sharp teeth are working at scalping Chase. Chase thrashes underneath Hector in a futile attempt to escape death. It is his last thought as he feels

Hector penetrate his skull bone and bite into his brain. Red splatter mixes with brain matter splashing about and leaking down the sides of Chase's ears until it rests on the icy floor.

Chase's blood is running dark on his skin. Skin, tanned a few seconds ago and golden in the candlelight, it is now ashen and stained red. Hector moves down Chase's body tearing his clothing off and gaining access to his chest and stomach. With a few bites he has disemboweled Chase splashing acid, blood and tissue everywhere. He is so busy suckling on Chase's heart that he hasn't heard or seen the men entering with their harpoons.

A taller Inuit shoots the harpoon from just inside the igloo's entrance and it spears right through Hector's head. Once he is down the boys run in and up to their dead parents. Dasan sobs while Chogan hides his emotions. A tear is threatening to fall and he angrily swipes it away. He stomps over to Hector's dead body and kicks him hard. Kicks him again. Then again. Elan, the taller Inuit, pulls Chogan away. "He is already dead." Chogan glares at Elan and then runs out of the igloo.

When Chogan stops running he hasn't realized he's gotten so far from home. Reluctantly, and with a wounded heart, he turns and runs back towards home. He reaches his home and discovers that all the bodies have already been removed. He finds himself wondering where they have been taken and at that very moment he feels guilty. It strikes him like lightening.

"I had to bring that bastard here didn't I? Why did I do that? If I didn't my parents would still be alive." He falls to his knees and finally allows the tears to drop. Each time he clears his eyes he can see the blood splatter around the igloo and he cries more. Bitterly he pushes away the gentle hand that caresses his shoulder.

"Come on ,Chogan. Come say goodbye to your parents." Elan speaks softly but firmly.

Elan helps Chogan to his feet and walks him out. Chogan sees his parents have been placed on a sled and each is covered with fur-lined skins. They are to be placed in a specially built snow house located back in the village and the usual five-day mourning will begin. The preparations are already underway.

"Where is Dasan?" Chogan questions as he shifts his eyes from his dead parents to Elan.

"He went ahead to let the villagers know that the snow house was now going to be used for your parents and uncle, instead of Hector."

“What do we do with Hector?”

“We will talk with the elder, Fala, and see what she says to do with Hector’s body and also where you and your brother will go. I’m happy to be your guardian, it is tradition to do so.”

Chogan’s chest heaves with a deep sigh and right at that moment he doesn’t care about being taken under the wing of anyone. He is so filled with the loss of his parents and how they were killed that his thoughts are on them and only them. Chogan knows the process. The one that wants to become guardian puts the offer to the elder and it will be decided on the spot. There is no ritual or time between such decisions; it is just whoever has the room in their igloo and who wants the responsibility of looking after orphaned children.

Back at the village Fala invites the boys and Elan into her home. She has the fire pit burning and has made tea. Smokes are handed out and she hums a strange sound as she potters around before sitting on a thick seal fur with her legs crossed over one another at the ankles. She looks up and stared at each boy in turn before shifting her gaze to Elan.

“Elan, you came to me for guardianship over these boys?”

“Yes.”

“You must guide them. Train them how to be good hunters and show them the ways of our traditions. Just as their parents would have.”

“I will.”

“Then it is done. You will from this day forward be their guardian.” Fala chews like she has put food in her mouth but there is nothing in her mouth. She just does the motions of chewing. Chogan feels it odd and has trouble looking away.

“What do we do about Hector?” Dasan asks in a whisper.

“Speak up boy!”

“I said what do we do with Hector?”

“He has murdered. He will be mourned for the same days but he will be cast out and left for the wild animals to tear him apart as he tore your parents and uncle apart.”

“Good!” Dasan says, sitting back and folding his arms in a huff across his chest. He puffs on his cigarette and drinks his tea with a scolding look across his young face.

Chogan remains silent the entire time they are with Fala. When she finishes with them, Elan escorts the boys out and shows them to his igloo.

His wife passed away a year ago and he has no children. After a meal they bed down for the night but sleep does not come for Chogan. He slips out of the igloo and walks for three miles using the sun above to guide him. He's going south away from his old home and heading towards the vast mountains that grow in the south of Alaska. Chogan doesn't mind the six months of daylight but he knows how much his brother struggles with it. The snow is bitterly cold but he is so numb with pain that he doesn't even notice the drastic drop in temperature. It isn't until a blizzard blows in that he finds himself wandering around in circles.

His mind drifts back to the stories of how Hector had got lost with his group of people, all eighteen of them presumed dead by the sea. Now he knows differently yet his mind can't shake the images of his dead parents and the anger builds. He stops moving and gathers his direction from the sun above and heads back to the village. When he gets there he enters the special snow house and sits between his parents. Chogan gazes at the white wall. He doesn't move. He doesn't sleep. The next morning Dasan comes charging in with Elan.

"Have you been in here all night brother?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Are you stupid, Dasan? Why do you think?"

"Well, yeah, I get that you want to be with them, but doesn't the smell put you off?"

"It is no different from the whale meat you eat."

Dasan thinks about that and though he doesn't answer he agrees. He pinches his nose and says his goodbyes and then exits. Just outside was Neka. Before Dasan can say anything to her she is hugging him and it causes him to fumble for his words, making him stutter.

"I...I...I"

"What is it, Dasan, are you sick?"

"No...I just...You just startled me. Yeah, that's it. You startled me is all."

"Oh! I'm sorry. I just wanted to pay my respects. Would you like me to leave?"

"No!" Dasan looks sideways and fiddles with his hands while his boots dig further into the snowy ground.

"Dasan, I am truly sorry that this has happened to your parents. Is there anything I can do?"

“Umm. I...I mean no thanks, there is nothing, but you can sit with me if you like?”

Neka looks up and directly at Dasan who has taken on a shade of red. Her gaze penetrates him like she is looking though glass and he feels two things. *Scared* and *excited*. He suggests they sit by the open fire pit and together they walk toward it. Once they are seated he plays with his fingers until she puts her gloved hand over his and quickly leans in and gives him a kiss on the cheek. He is so taken aback that he falls backwards giggling. He then jolts upright and looks hard at her before bringing her in for a kiss on her cheek. She makes all the sadness go away. They sit there for a few hours just talking, until her mother, Sulan, calls for Neka to do her daily duties.

Dasan remains by the open fire pit and thinks about Neka. After a long while he makes his way back to Elan’s home and together they go off to fish.

# The Dead Wake

“Chogan, would it be OK to sit with your parents?” Kasa, one of the other village women, whispers respectfully.

“Yes. It is OK. I need to take a walk and fed the dogs.”

No other words are exchanged, Chogan exits and walks off to get the meat for the dogs. After feeding them he hooks them up to a sled and takes them on a run. He has them run for miles before he stops and treats them to more seal meat. He pads himself a seat with the fur skins and rests against a rock wall and unintentionally falls asleep. The dogs sneer and growl at one another before they nest down and nap while Chogan sleeps.

Chogan wakes to a cold wind that slaps him in the face. After rubbing his eyes clear he notices the storm on the horizon and immediately he jumps up and gets the dogs ready. Chogan works quickly getting the dogs and making haste as fast as the dogs can run. The noise picks up behind him and he knows that storm is about to engulf him. He yells and whips the dogs to go faster but it is already too late. Chogan feels the weight of the sled lift off the ground then fall back down hard, almost knocking him off. He holds on tight and yells at the dogs to go faster.

Chogan raises a gloved hand to shield his eyes. His anticipation of the coldness and blinding sting slams into him as he expects. He has no choice but to lower his hand and hold onto to the sled with all he has. The wind and blasts of snow blind him and he instantly loses all sense of direction. Chogan hopes the dogs are running into the right path and not directly into a cliff wall. The imminent threat of an avalanche is peril to Chogan’s thoughts.

Chogan rocks, jumps and jolts violently as the sled is dragged furiously by the panicking dogs. Chogan tries to take a glance upwards but is forced downward with the powerful winds and the ever white flakes that whirl around him in an angry vortex. Chogan hears one of the dogs yelping in pain over the snow storm and it pains him that he can’t do anything to protect them other than hope. He hopes they will make it out. He hopes that shelter will be close. The dogs pull the sled harder and Chogan nearly falls off. He hears a massive boom behind him that seems to go from one direction to the next and just as he is pulled into the middle of a frozen lake

does he see the cliff become enveloped into a dust cloud of white that rises to the sky above and rushes toward him at the same time.

In seconds the powder is around Chogan, kissing him coldly. In another moment the weight of snow is surrounding him, suffocating him and his forward momentum being carried faster by the dogs. Without them he'd have been stuck in the death blow of white powder. It come crashing down with a tremendous power that rocks the ice below his sled. Time passes both in slow motion and in a flash, then he is still. Breathing heavily. Shaking the snow debris from his fur jacket and with new visibility he inspects his dogs. All but one is OK. Chogan gets off the sled for a closer look.

He has no choice but to cut the dog loose, both its back legs are broken and it has taken a sever knock to its nose. Blood has colored the ice in a splattering of dark red. He hates having to end the life of one of his dogs. But he has no choice, the dog was suffering and it will never serve as a working dog again. Chogan reluctantly pulls his fishing knife from the inside of his jacket and gets onto his knees. The dog is whimpering and shivering at the same time. It looks into Chogan's eyes as if pleading him to hurry up. Chogan takes the knife and swiftly slices the dog's throat. The other dogs in the pack give off a howl then a collective whine. Once Chogan has removed him from the tangled reins he carries it to the sled and lays him on the back. He then gets on and has the dogs pull him home.

Before the dogs enter the village they start to bark and become very agitated. Chogan isn't sure what to make of it. The closer they get to home the more restless and nervous the dogs act. It isn't until they have ridden a little further in does Chogan see the red spatter that are well spaced apart, as if whatever is bleeding has been moving quickly. The dogs refuse to go in any further and are turning around to head back out. Chogan uses his whip and calls out to the dogs to stop but they refuse. He has no choice but to jump off the sled. When he lands his left knee hits a hidden rock underneath the snow and splits the skin through his thick leather pants. He can feel the warm dampness running down his leg. Ignoring that he stands up and looks around. It is late afternoon, the time that his people are tending to the fires, and the mothers are preparing their young for supper and the fathers are returning with fish. Yet Chogan sees and hears no one.

Chogan walks towards his uncle's home, and sees that against the pristine snow the blood trail is stark. Small droplets have sprayed outward

into the white, making arcs of scarlet. Chogan looks down at the footprints and notes the chaos of many prints. His mind takes in the evidence and he keeps going. The closer he gets the more blood he finds and then visible from one of the igloos is a pair of bloodied boots. He rushes forward and finds an elder or what is left of him. The elder's body is spread around that entire igloo. Chogan scratches his forehead with his gloved hand and thinks about wolves.

"Dasan" he calls out while he looks around the village. Everywhere he looks he finds dead villagers. "Dasan!" he calls again. Then again even louder. The only noise he receives back is a clanking of pots from another igloo. Chogan blindly rushes in and calls out for Dasan. As soon as he enters he freezes, unable to take his eyes off of the three woman in there that are no longer human. They are feasting on two children. Their mouths are covered in gore and their eyes are something Chogan will remember for the rest of his life. Where their eyes should be, now are replaced with a whiteness, like a thick film has covered the eyes. It was also the snarling, the inability to talk, along with the odd crazy walk that leads Chogan to know he is looking at something no longer human.

Chogan rushes out of there and bangs into the pole where skins hang for tanning. They flap in his face slapping him and startling him. He feels a hand on his elbow and whirls around ready for a fight. He hears and sees Neka so he stops resisting and allows her to drag him off. She takes him behind the village where she's been hiding out. Her face is damp with tears. Her tanned complexion is now almost as white as the snow. She gets onto her knees and crawls through a hole, and Chogan follows. It is a tunnel that leads to a cave. In the cave are 36 other villagers.

"Where is Dasan? What is going on here? What happened?"

"Sit down." Comes a thick strong voice from the back of the cave. A tall man steps into the light and looks hard at Chogan. He has a scar running down the left side of his face and immediately Chogan remembers the story of the man who fought off the polar bear.

"We will answer your questions. Just be patient." The tall man says sternly. Chogan doesn't want to sit. He stands with his arms folded against his chest and glares at the tall man.

"Who are you?" Chogan rasps.

"I'm Moki. Your brother is out with Elan fishing. I don't know what those things are, but we are safe here."

“But how will we know when Dasan has returned. Those things are still out there. He and Elan aren’t safe. Why are you all cowering in here like scared mice? I must go and protect them. He is all I have left.” Chogan jeers.

“No. Neka will go and hide out like she did when she found you. She is the smallest and quietest. You stay. She goes.”

“You are not my guardian. I don’t have to listen to you.” Chogan snaps and stands up prepared to leave when Moki shoves him backwards hard enough to make him fall down. Chogan fumes and turns bright red, coloring his tan skin a dark copper. Moki has the simian eyes of an ape, crafty and cunning. They are simmering with spite as Chogan raises his arm to defend himself.

“Why aren’t you out there protecting the villagers?” Chogan demands again. Moki just glares at Chogan. Moki looks at Neka and she nods her head in silent agreement and exits the cave. Chogan is forced to stay put. It infuriates him. An hour has passed and Moki finally stops watching him like an eagle and wanders off toward the back of the cave to sit and chat with some of the other surviving villagers. Chogan waits until he is sure that Moki isn’t looking and then he slips out of the cave. He crawls back through the hole and before exiting he listens intently. The smell of death is being blown around in the gusty winds. He has to hold his breath. He has a fair idea where Elan would have taken his younger brother fishing. “I need the dogs damn it.” He mutters to himself as he steps out of the hole and stands up, his eyes darting in every direction. He can’t see Neka and he hears nothing so he runs, and he doesn’t stop running.

“I’ll find you brother. I will find you!” He whispers through gritted teeth, his jaw held so tightly that his top teeth slip off the bottom and grated loudly throughout his head. He grimaces tightly and shakes the sound away and carries on running. In the distance he can see a runaway sled, traveling east, with a body on top that is barley staying on. On the other side of the village more dogs are taking off. He realizes he has to leave the village and find the dogs that brought him in. Two miles outside of the village Chogan finds the dogs resting. He rushes up and jumps onto the sled, picks up the whip and whips the dogs into moving. He hasn’t gone more than half a mile when he sees Elan walking behind his sled and his baby brother sitting on top singing so loudly he can hear him this far away. “Thank God!” Chogan calls.

“Where are you going, Chogan.” A surprised Dasan asks when the sled comes to a stop. The dogs get into a bitter squabble and it takes Elan a few moments to settle them.

“I was looking for you. All, no, most of the villagers have been killed and Moki has taken what survivors he could into a cave. He’s hiding out like some kind of cowardly fox.”

“Slow down, Chogan. What do you mean the villagers are dead?” Elan steps in and speaks sternly.

“I dunno how or why but it was our parents.”

“Don’t lie!” Dasan cries.

“I’m not. It is the truth.”

“It can’t be. Our parents were dead; I saw them myself.”

“We all saw them.” Elan says while rubbing his arms and digging his boots into the snow.

“What do we do, Elan?”

“Get on my sled.” Elan barks.

“Where are we going?” Chogan and Dasan say simultaneously while Chogan slips on the back of Elan’s sled.

“To the trading post. We can get some help and weapons.” Elan bleats as he flicks his whip and the dogs start out. This time instead of walking behind the dogs he jumps onto the sled too. The trading post is a good hour away.

“Is Neka one of the dead?” Dasan gulps.

“No. She actually is being used by Moki. He has her spying out for survivors and then when she finds them she takes them to the hidden cave.”

“That bastard”

“Yes ,little brother, Moki is a complete bastard.”

“You two stop that now. Moki is neither a bastard nor a coward. He’ll be doing what he knows best. Enough with the both of you.”

“Yes, Elan.” Dasan says while using his gloved hand to thump Chogan’s thigh and intently gawks at him.

“Do that again, little brother, and I’ll push you off.”

“You wouldn’t.”

“My God! Did you two act like this with your parents?”

Chogan looks at Dasan and they both laugh before Dasan remembers his dead parents and he turns his head away from Chogan to hide his tears. Chogan knows what he is doing and says no more.

“Finally some peace and quiet.” Elan retorts.

At the trading post Elan trades in the fresh fish he and Dasan have caught and two seal skins for three rifles and two boxes of bullets.

“Is there anyone, anyone at all that wants to come back with us. We need all the help we can get?”

“If you had of been here yesterday, perhaps some of the white man would have helped. We aren’t expecting anyone else for a month.” The little old lady quibbles as she inspects the skins.

“If by chance someone does come in please send them to us. We don’t know what it is we are facing exactly but whatever it is, is death!”

The little old lady doesn’t look up from the skins and while she rubs them up and down she mutters “Yes” to Elan. Elan takes the rifles and exits the store. He looks at the barren street and sighs.

“Where is the help?” Dasan calls out.

“There isn’t any one here to help. We have to do this ourselves.”

“How?” Dasan whimpers and turns his focus on his older brother. “How, Chogan? How?”

“Let Elan tell us.” Chogan rasps while he takes one of the rifles and gives it a wipe down.”

“Elan!” Dasan frets.

“I think it is best we get close to the village then leave the dogs and walk in, hopefully they won’t hear us. Then we can shoot them.”

“But that’s our parents.” Dasan sobs.

“They are already dead. I saw that. You saw that. Everyone of the villagers saw them dead. Enough talking we have to get back. I don’t want to be caught in a storm, you know how unpredictable the weather is. One minute the sun is shining casting so much light over the snow that they look like a billion crystals. The next thing the snow is being pulled into a whirlpool of fury that one can’t see a foot in front of them.” Elan jibes.

# Kill or be killed

As planned, Elan has the dogs stop before entering the village. Quietly he leads the way on foot with the boys following behind. A scream can be heard coming from somewhere within the village.

"How many villagers did Moki have in that cave, Chogan?"

"Thirty or more, why?"

"I am just working out how many are left."

"How many?" Chogan stops and looks right at the back of Elan's head. "Elan, how many?"

Elan stops but does not turn around. His voice is hard, carrying a mix of torment and anger in it. "Without knowing who was out fishing or hunting there would be around 75 left, and we don't know how many more Moki got into the cave while we have been gone."

A darkening blur rushes past Elan's peripheral vision and he swirls hard in the snow to face what it is. His mind rattles deeply when he recognizes his cousin Wapi. Elan has to look twice. Then twice more. Wapi is hunched up making a growling inhuman sound. Elan quickly notices the blood stains covering his fur jacket and are splattered across the front of Wapi's pants. His hood is down and Elan can see his face, or what remains of it. Half of one side is missing parts; part of his nose, eye and ear and the side of his lips are chunked out leaving gaping holes like he's had his face pecked at by the Gyrfalcon, thinks Elan. Elan keeps low and hidden while he watches his cousin sniff at the air, and dribble something like frothy foam and walk like he is drunk on white man's fire juice. Out of nowhere a boom rattles out and Elan jumps in a fright at the sudden noise.

"Chogan. NO!" Elan fumes.

"He was one of them. He'd have killed us."

"One of what?"

"Them, those, whatever they are. Like my parents. Like Hector." Chogan insists.

Elan says nothing. He flicks a livid look at Chogan while making his way to Wapi's corpse. He gets on his knees and has a closer look at Wapi. Without warning Wapi lunges for Elan in such a rage it spooks him. "Cousin it is me, Elan." Wapi snarls like an untamed beast and makes another grab for Elan. "Stop!" Cries Elan. Wapi again reaches out grabbing

at Elans jacket. Elan quickly sees Wapi's fingers. At first he thinks he has bad frostbite from not wearing his gloves but then he soon realizes frostbite doesn't grow fingernails like talons from a dinosaur. Elan uses the snow to dig his heels in and quickly backs out of Wapi's reach. As soon as Elan gets onto his feet he takes the rifle and shoots Wapi in the head.

"OK Chogan I believe you now." He apologizes. When he gets no response he turns to face the boys but they are gone, he looks towards the village and sees Dasan out front and Chogan chasing after him. "Stupid boys." Elan mutters while getting into a run and taking off after them.

"Dasan stop!" Chogan shouts.

"No! I have to save Neka." Dasan calls back and continues running.

The smell of blood mingles with the odor of hanging whale meat filling the air with such a bitter stench that it penetrates all of Dasan's senses that he gags. He puts one of his gloved hands to his face covering his mouth and nose while he keeps running. The atmosphere tingles with violence ramping up Dasan's fears.

Dasan hasn't gone far into the village when he abruptly stops and his mouth opens wide to scream. His eyes take in the visual carnage and the inability to process what he is seeing stuns him. The spell is severed when Chogan places his gloved hand upon Dasan's shoulders and coos to him softly. "Come with me." When Dasan turns to follow Chogan both of them stilled with terror when an inhuman fury-filled scream rips right behind them. They turn and scream back. Three of the villagers are howling and foaming at the mouth while they charge after the boys.

"Get down!" Elan shrieks. The boys dive to the snowy earth and put their gloved hands to their ears. Elan fires his rifle until he is out of bullets. The sound is like hearing a distant avalanche, muses Chogan. When the firing stops he roughly grabs his brother by the back of his jacket, yanks him to his feet and pushes him to run. Together they run until they are again outside of the village and both of them are heaving for air. Elan isn't far behind them when he is suddenly grabbed savagely and pulled to the ground by someone neither of the boys recognize.

"Stay here and keep low. If any more of them head your way...I want you to run. Run and don't stop running. You hear me?" Chogan demands. He grabs his brother by the shoulders and shakes him. "Make sure you run." Dasan agrees but in the back of his mind all he can think about is Neka.

Chogan rushes up to Elan and takes aim on the thing that has sunk it's busted teeth into the side of Elan's neck. Blood has colored up the white snow and begins to pool underneath Elan's quivering body. Chogan pushes the rifle into the head of the thing that is feasting on Elan and he squeezes the trigger. The man's head explodes and dark claret-colored gunk and a tooth hit Chogan in the face. Chogan shakes himself clear and wipes it away with the back of his jacket. Then he grabs Elan's outstretched arm and drags him. He doesn't have the strength to pull him far. Elan tries to get up but feels weak. Chogan helps him until Elan finds enough strength to stand, but before Chogan has taken a single step Elan has fallen back down. "Go!" he whispers.

"No!"

"Now is not the time to disrespect me. I said go!"

"Damn it! You are all we have left, Elan. I'm not going to just leave you here."

"You have no choice. Just go. I feel something horribly wrong inside of me. It is like my insides are being harpooned. The pain...oh dear God...this pain. Get out while you can. I..."

"NO!!!"

"I'm dying, Chogan. I can feel it. Leave me here. Go save your brother and anyone else. Save them. Save..."

Chogan looks at Elan and he can see that the man is dying. His skin has turned ghastly; greying and paling at the same time. His breathing is erratic and labored. His nostrils are flaring and he has started to go in and out of consciousness. Even the bite wounds constantly pour bright red liquid. Chogan knows Elan is dying and he can't do a damn thing about it.

"Fine!" Chogan whines and takes off. Chogan stops just a few feet from Elan and when he turns to rush back and get him he is devastated to see Elan jolt around like an angry wounded sea lion. The noise Elan is making overwhelms Chogan and he finds his voice and screams. Screams for his dead parents. Screams for the dead villagers and he screams for Elan. He quickly realizes that his screams are causing him unwanted attention. The dead villagers are coming for him. He fixes his gaze on the looming group and contemplates his options.

Without warning he rushes up to Dasan, snatches at him roughly and has him run with him. They reach the dogs and without talking Chogan gets the dogs moving with the harsh whip that cracks like distant thunder. Dasan

gets on the back of the sled and looks at the oncoming group. They are gaining on them. Once the dogs take off at full speed the group begins to vanish. The further away Chogan gets them the less visible the creatures are.

"Where we gonna go, Chogan?"

"Back to the trading post."

"What for now?"

"Explosives."

"What the hell are you going to trade to get them?"

"Nothing. I'll steal it."

"You can't!"

"Just watch me."

"Were gonna get in trouble." Dasan says worriedly.

"Trust me. This is for our parents. For Elan. For the villagers. We have no choice." Chogan seethes.

"I want no part of this. You know what they will do if we are caught." Dasan blubbers.

"I know. But we have no choice. You want to save Neka don't you?"

'Yes. If she's still alive."

"She will be. She's smart."

"I hope so, brother, I do. We have no one and nothing left. What exactly are you planning on blowing up?"

"You'll see." Chogan insists. He says no more, the wind has picked up and it is getting harder to talk over the noise.

When Chogan enters the trading post area he makes sure to take a good look around. It is as void as the frozen lake that stretches for many miles. He has the dogs stop and when he gets off he turns to look at his brother.

"Stay here and take this." Chogan hands the whip over to Dasan who just looks at it and bows his head down. "When I run out I want you to whip the dogs, get them going, you hear me?"

'Yes." Sighs Dasan.

Dasan watches Chogan enter the store. Dasan puts the handle of the whip into his left hand and then into his right, never taking his eyes from the wooden building. The door swings wide open and Dasan raises the whip to get the dogs moving. When he looks at the door again he sees an old man walking out with an armful of furs. Dasan huffs and tells the dogs to stop. Dasan looks at the door again and when it opens a second time he is ready

to get the dogs going, this time it is his brother and he is carrying a wooden crate with the words TNT written on it. Dasan yells at the dogs to move and throws the whip behind him and then forcefully cracks it at the side of the dogs. The noise alone gets them moving and once they have started to get into a run Chogan is already jumping onto the back. He tosses the crate up first and then himself. The old woman has come outside and stands on the wooden porch yelling at Chogan. Chogan can't help but laugh at her. They are out of her sight quicker than a shooting star, muses Chogan.

Back at the village Dasan has the dogs stop again. He knows by how rowdy and agitated they are and that they are hungry.

"We have to feed the dogs soon or they are going to eat each other."

"Dasan, the dogs won't eat each other. But they will fight. We have no more meat. Well, not on this sled. We have to get the village clear first. Then we can feed the dogs. I promise." Chogan says softly as he steps off the sled and pulls the crate to the ground. Dasan watches with great enthusiasm before turning his attention to the distant screams he can hear. Chogan takes out twelve of the sticks and heads toward the very skirt of the village entrance. Then he turns sharply left and starts to place them around an old pile of rocks. Dasan is confused.

"What good is it going to be blowing up all those rocks?"

"Sometimes I forgot how old you are." Chogan says while thumping Dasan across the shoulders.

"Chogan. What are you doing? You have to tell me!"

"OK fine! I'm going to lure the creatures here and then when I blow up the rocks they will all be hit by the flying debris acting like multiple guns going off so we can get more of them in one go. We can't take them all on at once, we don't have enough rifles, and forget trying to harpoon them. Just the two of us, imagine that. This is the best option. The only sure-fire one that will take a lot of them out at one given time. You see now, right?"

"Well, I hope you have a way to lure them here?"

"I do."

"God it is like pulling your pubic hair out one by fucking one. Let me know what the plan is. Shithead!"

"I'm the plan. I'm the goddamn bait!"

"You can't be serious?"

"I've never been more serious in my life. I'm in charge now and I'm doing this, like it or not. I'm doing this!"

“You are crazy stupid!” Dasan blubbers.

“Make yourself useful and bring over the rest of the explosives.” Chogan demands.

Dasan does as he was ordered. He brings the remaining 12 and helps put them in various places around the rocks. Dasan curiously watches Chogan take a long master wire and lead it away from the rocks. The wire is attached to a rectangular shaped metal box that has a handle on the top that loops over like a bridge.

“Get the dogs and go back a mile.” Chogan orders.

Dasan doesn’t want to do that but for the safety of the dogs he does. When he is well away he has the dogs stop and then he gets off and runs back to where Chogan stands.

“Why are you back here? Go back to the dogs, brother. You’ll be safer there. Should this go wrong you have to save yourself. Go find another village and live so you can learn your heritage. It is important.”

“No. I’m staying and you can’t make me go away; besides you are the lure and when you are running those things towards that pile of rocks you’ll need me. You can’t be in two places at once.” Dasan says while he indicates with his dark brown eyes the rocks and then the device to blow it all up.

Chogan thinks about this for a while.

“You’re finally growing up.” Chogan snickers and punches Dasan in the middle of his back and then takes off toward the village, hoping his brother won’t follow. When he sees that he isn’t, he stops running and walks. As he walks he whistles loudly and when no one shows he starts to yell throughout the middle of the village. He doesn’t have to yell any more, though, as a group of villagers comes charging at him. It isn’t enough thinks Chogan. There has to be more he says out loud.

Chogan circles back around making sure he keeps enough distance from the charging group. As he does, more and more join the group. He keeps going and finds his throat burning and in need of liquid, but he can’t stop. When he looks at the group making chase he can see there is at least 45 villagers and that is enough for him. He makes his way, as fast as he has ever run before, right toward the rocks. He makes sure the creatures are following, and when he sees they are he jumps up and down and yahoos, taunting them. They growl, spit, and hiss as they make their hungry way towards him.

When they are close enough to see Chogan, he runs behind another pile of rocks and once the creatures follow and he can see them right where he wants them he yells out. “Go. Do it now.”

Dasan barely hears his brother and has just enough time to detonate the TNT before the group of creatures sniffs him out. He closes his eyes and pushes hard on the handle and within a few seconds a massive boom ripples through the air. A cloud of dust bursts into the air and flying rocks whirl in every direction. Most of the creatures are caught right in the blast obliterating them into pieces. The ones that didn’t get caught in the direct blast are hit with the flying rock debris. The others fall down a deep massive hole that has opened with the blast and the snow-covered earth splits wide and deep emptying the creatures right into it.

When the dust settles Dasan comes out of hiding and is able to see the things lying on the ground squirming and desperately trying to get up. Most of them are missing limbs; arms and legs are scattered around the snow like bird food. The rest have fallen into the deep hole. Dasan runs up and peers over the edge. It is so deep that he can’t even see the bottom. He screams when he feels a hand grabbing at his jacket.

“It is me.” Comes an excited voice. Dasan looks up and sees his brother has erupted into a wide smile that shows his yellowing cracked teeth.

“You did it.” Dasan chuffs.

“No, brother, we did it.”

“Now what do we do?”

“Put the rest of those bodies into the hole and then find out who is left in the village. There maybe more so we have to keep our wits about us.” Chogan spoke authoritatively, but Dasan found it hard to take him seriously when Chogan was smiling like an excited toddler.

“Don’t let them near you with their mouths. Pull them by their head and just drag them to the hole, then kick them in.” Chogan orders, his smile has not wavered, sticking with him in such a way that Dasan starts to giggle.

Once they clear the heads and torso’s they decide to leave the blown up arms, legs, guts and fingers, even two tongues in the snow purposely for the dogs to eat. Together they make their way into the village.

Moki is rushing toward them with Neka and a few of the other villagers following behind them.

“What did you do, Chogan?” Moki blasts.

“I did what you couldn’t. I got rid of the creatures.” Chogan says proudly.

“Did you get all of them?”

“You tell me? Is there any more in the village?”

“We came out when we heard the explosion and we haven’t seen any.”

“Well, spread out and look. What are you standing around talking to me for? We have people to save.” Chogan storms. Dasan casts a look at Chogan and snorts with a fat smile directed at his brother’s gleefully happy face.

The rest of the survivors search every part of the village. Three more creatures are found and killed, and their bodies are dumped into the hole. Unbeknownst to the remaining villagers six creatures wandered off several hours earlier in search of living flesh to tear apart and they are now in the next village 30 miles away.

The end.

Thank you for reading the ‘The Dead Wake Anthology.’ Gaining exposure as an independent author relies mostly on word-of-mouth, so if you have the time and inclination, please consider leaving a review wherever you can. Thank you :)

Feel free to email me author1ellie@gmail.com with any questions you may have about this book, or anything at all. I will always reply.

Best wishes.

***Ellie Douglas***

## About the Author

Ellie Douglas is a Kiwi writer, who currently resides in New Zealand, with her husband and four children. As a child, Enid Blyton and Stephen King inspired her love of writing and reading. When she is not writing, she can be found designing one of a kind pre-made book covers.

Her passions of creative art led her to becoming a *talented sought-after* freelance cover artist.

In her free time, she enjoys the cinema, anything and everything to do with Horror, in particular zombies, spending time with her children, music and dancing.

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